

"OVIDIUS" UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL DOMAIN: THEOLOGY

DOCTORATE THESIS

abstract

***The Creation of the World in the Thinking
of the Holy Fathers (Ist–VIIIth Centuries)***

PhD Supervisor:

PROF. UNIV. DR. GHEORGHE ANGHELESCU

PhD Candidate:

PR. IORDAN OPRIȘAN

CONSTANȚA
2015

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Keywords: *anthropology, image and likeness, cosmology, knowledge, doctrine, eschatology, evolution, deification, logos, patristic, original sin, rationality, redemption, revelation.*

ABSTRACT

This thesis, with the title "The Creation of the World in the Thinking of the Holy Fathers (Ist–VIIIth Centuries)" represents an analysis of the patristic cosmological teaching, a systematization of the main chapters of it, considering that the fundamental ideas of the cosmology of the Fathers always remain relevant, their perspective beain a revealing one, necessary especially in the scientific and philosophical context of our contemporary world.

From a Christian perspective, both the whole world, and man, find the start and the end in God; He is the Author and Creator of all the elements that sustain life and life itself, so the Psalmist exclaims rightly contemplating the splendor that surrounded him: " How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps. 103, 25). It is just one of the many texts in Scripture that refer explicitly to the wisdom of God, that the ultimate reason of every thing, however small and insignificant it may seem at first glance, can be found in its Creator.

The Christian doctrine of creation is fundamentally different compared to the mythology or the philosophical

and scientific cosmology. Following a natural knowledge, the man does not know when and how did the Universe emerge. Philosophy and science can only try to approximate the mysteries of the world, the initial lifeless chaos and the coherence of the universe, for which reason the natural revelation is complemented by the supernatural revelation.

As we see in the Divine Revelation, the world, the whole universe has a beginning and an ultimate cause, ie a Creator who brought everything into existence from non-existence, followed by a continual providence.

God the Father is the Almighty, the Maker of "heaven and earth", of the spiritual world and of the material world; He is also the Governor, the Father that supports the entire world with the grace of His love, that protects and moves this world, constantly and mysteriously, for the purpose for which it was created. "That in His hand are the earth and the heights of the mountains are his. That the sea is his and he made it and the land they built his hands "(Ps. 94, 4-5). As the patristic authors interpreted the biblical texts, though the creative initiative rests with God the Father, the Universe is actually the result of the loving communion of the Trinity: all comes from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

Revelation tells us that God created the world not out of a pre-existing matter, nor from Himself, but *out of*

nothing. Through the concept of "creatio ex nihilo", the Christian theology has defined a position totally different compared to the pantheism of the ancient thought – which considered that the material world exists from eternity, being shaped by the Demiurge from a substance already present. On the contrary, in the Christian doctrine, the world has a beginning synonymous with the act of bringing it into existence from nothingness, the act of creation being determined just by the free will of God and motivated by His endless kindness.

The actions of creating and organizing the universe are committed only on the Creator's initiative, the creation being subsequently supported into existence by the divine energies. The Eastern Fathers spoke in this regard on a continuous descent of the Godhead energy to the world and about a rational and free ascent of the world to Him.

This "continuous creation" is possible when the Creator keeps an internal connection to the universe through His uncreated energies and bring things into existence by their internal reasons at the right time, according to His wisdom¹

¹ Sf. Irineu al Lyonului, *Adversus haereses* (*Contre les hérésies*), vol. V, II, p. 245; Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor*, 42, p. 79; Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii la Hexaemeron*, I, 6, p. 77-78; Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Facere*, III, 1, 2, p. 47-48; Didim din Alexandria (cel Orb), *Despre Duhul Sfânt*, p. 103; Sf. Dionisie Areopagitul, *Despre numirile dumnezeiești*, p. 147; Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, 84, p. 226, etc. See also: Pr.

God, the supreme being, is a loving life between the three persons of the single being. He creates the world out of love, as a work of supreme beauty (κόσμος), in order that His creatures (angels and men) to share in the love that extends continuously from Himself and to enjoy forever by an effort of communion and fellowship and loving response to their Creator.

As reflected in the patristic literature, the whole content of the biblical essay about creation reveals a full, synthetic and rational exposure of God's work, a unified presentation of the accomplishment of His eternal plan. "God created the world according to the plan that He thought from eternity, which includes the general rationality of those created, with all their particular genera and species, designed in a uniform manner [...]. There is an overall rationality of the world, with all its variety of genres, a unity of each gender, with all the variety of species subordinated, and one unity of each species, with all the variety of individuals who belong to it, and a unity of the individuals with all the variety of components and accidents".² This rational act of creation, as it passes

Dumitru Stăniloae, *Dinamica creației în Biserică*, în *O*, XXIX (1977), nr. 3-4, p. 28; Pr. Dumitru Popescu, Doru Costache, *Introducere în dogmatica ortodoxă*, Edit. Libra, București, 1997, p. 122, etc.

² Pr. Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, EIB, București, 2005, p. 153-154.

through the filter of the Fathers' thought, I have decided to present systematically in this thesis.

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Given the wide coverage of the subject and the limited space of this paper, many significant topics related to the issue of origins are briefly presented or ignored. Clearly, this is not a work about all the aspects of cosmology.

The central aim and purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the essential conceptions that Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, presented tangentially in the context of the modern science, in all their aspects, provide to us regarding the creation of the world and the relationship between God and the world or man. I started this research from the analysis of the texts of *Genesis* about the origin of the universe, with a careful insight into the writings of the Fathers and some brief references to modern scientific theories on the subject.

For this purpose, we found it necessary to contribute effectively to clarify certain sensitive theological and scientific issues, referring thus not only to the general issues of the patristic, mainly known, but to the problems and the interrogations of the contemporary man in relation to the proposed topic for study.

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The patristic perspective we proposed in addressing this issue involves undoubtedly combining the biblical and scientific research methods, but maintaining the framework of the dogmatic teachings of faith established by the sources of Christianity and, of course, the demands of theological research work.

Regarding the bibliographical sources used, we tried to capitalize the Romanian literature, but also the studies and the research from abroad, which provided to us a rich and very valuable information. We had of course taken many theories formulated and affirmed by others, long before us, throughout Christian history, conforming us customary scientific work, but we also tried to make this approach accessible to the understanding of the human living in the third millennium.

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This paper has five sections. They are preceded by an introduction, in which we have established technical details related to the development of work (purpose, research methods, structure work) and have justified the choice of subject.

The first part of the paper entitled „The knowledge about the world – between the philosophical systems of antiquity and the patristic thought”, begins with a brief presentation on the gnosiological framework regarding the reason-faith / theology-science relation, using the

theorizing on some fundamental concepts for the areas concerned.

Next we presented the essential characteristics of the ancient cosmology (dominated by pantheism), and also the turning to a theology of creation, taught by the Fathers.

The mythological imagination and the philosophical speculation were the main forms of human response given to the enigma of origins. While in search of basic elements from which the world came into being, the greatest philosophers of antiquity have argued that the world has emerged from a primordial substance, and no change is due to an external cause, but to the primordial movements of the matter. Thus, Thales argued that *water* is the origin of all things; Anaximandru called the primordial substance *Apeiron* (infinity) and Anaximenes considered the *air* (πνεῦμα) as the original matter of all things. Others, like Heraclitus, supposed that the *fire* was the foundation of the world, and Pythagoras was even of the view that everything is derived from the *number*.

To these points have to oppose at the end of Antiquity, the truth of the Christian Revelation. Fathers have defined, with every occasion, their different position regarding the Greek philosophy.

In Part II of the paper, entitled "The creation of the world in the patristic thought ", we aimed to achieve a

brief presentation of the biblical essay about creation, based on facts and interpretations inspired revelation of the Holy Fathers of the Church. This section makes up the largest part of the work in it being inventoried and analyzed the main elements that make up the subject of this paper: "Trinity and creation", "creation of the world in God's plan from eternity", "creation of the world out of nothing", "creation and time", "the motive and the purpose of creation", "the world as a gift of love of the Trinity", "the created world – image of the divine ideas", "the creation of the world and the origin of evil".

I emphasized mainly the importance of the fact that the creation *out of nothing*, with all its dogmatic implications, was one of the fundamental ideas of Christian theology, which differs from the beginning cosmological model Christian of other older or newer philosophical religious or scientific, which excludes God from creation or limit its actions to a simple set of preexisting materials. The world is created by the Triune God *from nothing*, according to the eternal plan, one of the world during free movement through a structural rationality, there's fulfillment in eternal communion and sharing likeness tripersonală. Just creation from nothing can explain the way the existence of the world and also can give meaning to this existence.

However, in trying to finding a just relationship

between patristic interpretation of biblical essay and current scientific cosmology theories, we highlighted the inspired intuitions of the Fathers compatible over time with data science today. Church Fathers and theologians such as St. Basil the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John of Damascus and others have not seen a timeline biblical essay or biological history of creation, but a functional perspective. The truth about the origin of the world and man and other personal being in the universe we can not know the path of limited rational or scientific, but to us it acquired through faith, in your divine Revelation, recognizing that God has revealed about the origins just so as we needed to know.

The third part of this paper presents "Anthropology in the light of the Scripture and of the writings of the Fathers". Key problems of anthropology biblical and patristic generally are the creation of man and his place in the creation, the dichotomy of human being (body and soul), the primordial state of man, the image and likeness of man with God, the sin, the current state of man and world, or human interrelationships and purposes.

In Holy Scripture and the Fathers, the issue of man is treated soteriologically. The description of the human origin, its composition and the situations through which man goes, has no place, in the sources of Revelation, by the virtue of a an end in itself. Man is seen as a rational

creature of God, but in this history is not happy condition for which it was intended and therefore his revelation provides the knowledge path that can deliver the fallen state.

All Fathers generally developed anthropological topics of interest, although special anthropology treatises are rare. Patristic authors generally aim to debate the issue of human salvation, the special act of creation of which is commented especially in this context. Saints Basil and John Chrysostom (IVth century) are important to Christian anthropology it gives us rich comments on man's creation in the context of the creation of the world. St. Maximus the Confessor (VIIth century) sees the reason of man according to divine reason (Logos Christ) but also about the reasons for the irrational creature is liable. St. John Damascene (VIIIth century) summarizes the chapters relating to human creation, composition and destiny, in his systematic theology.

This soteriological anthropology shows us that we can not talk about the creation of man not address the ontological restoration of man by Christ and the possibilities of perfection. For the Son of God creates man in his image, and he was the one who comes to restore, to cure the disease that had entered the human nature by sin. The Incarnation is the greatest honor which is given to man them. Man can not be fulfilled either by itself or by

material things or by something else. His only perspective remains Christ. Only Christ affirms the value of the human person: "Man is truly man only by the God-man and God-Man."³ It is imperative to return to the anthropological doctrine of Holy Scripture and of the Fathers, because, as Father Dumitru Stăniloae well observed, only such an anthropology can provide to the human "the normative of his existence".⁴

Part IV of the paper, "The perspective of the patristic cosmology and the evolution of the philosophical and scientific models", provides an overview of the relationship between science, philosophy and theology in addressing the proposed subject. Open conflict between theology and science, dating back over two centuries, has deep roots in history, and his settlement related to overcoming mindsets and ignorance. Although today the two sides (theology and science) are not totally incompatible, however, by inertia, scientific efforts to explain the origin of the world excluded any involvement of God in creation. The fact that the question of the origin of the universe leaves still much controversy and doubt, even still maintained at a certain level, relations antagonistic

³ Arhim. Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om. Abisurile și culmile filosofiei*, Edit. Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 62.

⁴ Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Elemente de antropologie ortodoxă*, în vol. „Prinos închinat Înalț Prea Sfințitului Nicodim...”, București, 1946, p. 243.

between religion and science is due, on the one hand, the false illusion of autonomy of man from God, that feels better alone in a universe that tends to dominate him for his own pleasure, and on the other hand a particular type of approach theological, especially in the tradition of scholastic Western, has claimed its own autonomy in relation with the patristic perspective.

The last part of the paper, "The fulfillment of creation" includes teaching on the final stage of creation and existence of the ultimate reality show about the history of salvation: that is the full realization of the Kingdom of God or "life of the age to come". Eschatology relates to a new order of existence, the ultimate transfiguration state, beyond history, but which is already present here and now confronting current history. For this final renewal of the world since its creation going ages.

If the words primordial Scripture proclaims: "Let there be light!" (Gen. 1, 3), the final revelation shows us all creation clothed with light: the purpose of creation is sharing, union with God, whom we have seen and we feel now in us, to the point that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pt. 1, 4). Everything becomes light: "The darkness of Mount Sinai will turn into the light of Mount Tabor, where Moses could see, finally, the glorious face of

the incarnate God".⁵ Summarizing, the Christian cosmological vision involves "not only that the world had a beginning, but it will have an end ... The whole world does not submit to non-existence, but such as our bodies will transform, so will the world will be re-created by the divine power of the Spirit in a more godly, to be on our measure".⁶ The uncreated Light gradually fills creation, making the latter a place of rest in God. If the act of creation is followed by God's rest on the seventh day, the history of creation is completed in all rest in God, in light of the eighth day without evening. Among the seven days of creation described in biblical essay and on the eighth day gradually taste the resurrection of Christ Church, which no longer involves decomposing human nature into the death but a movement toward endless inexhaustible source of life.

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In this paper I insisted on two fundamental aspects: on the fact that the themes of cosmology were developed on the ground of the trinitarian systematizations; and that the patristic authors have treated the theme of creation

⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *După chipul și asemănarea lui Dumnezeu*, Edit. Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 35.

⁶ Sf. Grigorie Palama, *Cele 150 de capete*, 2, în „Filocalia românească”, vol. 7, p. 424-425.

never independent of soteriology, or separate of an ecclesiological-eschatological vision.

According to patristic interpretations, creation appears to be the work of the Holy Trinity, and not of a single person without the participation of the other. Creation is certainly attributed to the Father, but Father always creates through His Word, while it is the Spirit that animates all. Trinitarian communion is both the reason and purpose of creation. God brings the world into existence out of love and to love. This implies a creation that can participate in this call, somewhat wearing printed image of the Trinity. But creative Reason is seen in the case of man, who got the "seal" divine image, likeness to develop, in a movement encompassing the entire existence and the whole cosmos.

The existing form is personal and rational created by virtue of its communion is inevitable fate, after whose structure is formed. Patristic cosmology and anthropology is built on triadologic. No one absolute God is the one who creates, but personal God alive. Starting from here, we can say that creation is a result of a being, and restoration is not simply a result of a power; they are, above all, individual acts – acts of love eternal tri-personal communion. The world is the work of the Holy Trinity, restored by Christ, the Church meant eternal communion, the total devotion to endless dialogue of love with God.

From the patristic references brought in this paper we have seen that, first, from a dogmatic point of view, the patristic cosmology is emerging on the background of clarifying the doctrine of the Trinity. The relevance of this context can be seen in plan development and patristic thought in the Eastern and Western theologies of evolution so far. The image of the Creator and the image of creation are closely related, depending on each other. And the failure of a large part of our contemporary world to further seize any connection between God and the universe in which we live can be attributed to an excessively rigid way of seeing the divine. Replacing the living God of Revelation with what could be called "the God of the philosophers"⁷ had as reverse the gradual despiritualization of the mundane reality. Creation ceased to be seen as a *way to God* as the divine essence conceptualization left increasingly less space for a vision of the personal presence. For this reason, presenting patristic teaching on creation of the world not only involves systematizing information from the works of the Fathers, but primarily the recovery of this functional personalist perspective.

⁷ Cf. John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină*, EIB, București, 1996, p. 253.

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