



Creation vs. Evolution

Prepared by: Daniel Fanous

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REFERENCES

Archimandrite Sophrony, *His Life is Mine*, svvPress.
Fr. Andrey and Bishop Alexander, www.fatheralexander.org
Fr. Lev Gillet, *Orthodox Spirituality*, svvPress.
Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures, *Genesis 1-11*.

MEMORY VERSE

Then God said, “**Let the earth bring forth** the living creature according to its kind (Gen. 1:24)

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:27)

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR THE SERVANT(S)

Read the lesson, and then read Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

THE LESSON

Archimandrite Sophrony in *His Life is Mine*, relates a story of the difference between faith and science:

I once heard the following story of a professor of astronomy who was enthusiastically discoursing in a planetarium on the nebulae and like marvels. Noticing an unpretentious priest who had joined his group of students, the professor asked him:

‘What do your Scriptures say about cosmic space and its myriad of stars?’

Instead of giving a direct answer the priest in turn posed a question.

‘Tell me, Professor,’ he said, ‘do you think that science will invent still more powerful telescopes to see even farther into the firmament?’

‘Of course progress is possible and science will always be perfecting apparatus for exploring outer space,’ replied the astronomer.

‘There is hope, then, that one day you will have telescopes that can show all there is in the cosmos, down to the last detail?’

‘That would be impossible – the cosmos is infinite,’ replied the scientist.

‘So there is a limit to science?’

‘Yes, in that sense, there is.’

‘Well, Professor,’ said the priest, ‘where your science comes to a full stop, ours begins, and that is what our Scriptures tell us of.’

The Problem

We are taught consistently in our education systems that the only feasible understanding of creation is that of evolution. In response to this many of the western “churches” have put forth a system that is known as *creationism*. It is useful to firstly define these words:

Creationism:

A literal belief in the biblical account of Creation as it appears in the Book of Genesis. Creationists believe that the creation of the world and all its creatures took place in six calendar days; they therefore deny the theory of evolution.

Evolution:

The process by which species of organisms arise from earlier life forms and undergo change over time through **natural selection**. The modern understanding of the origins of species is based on the theories of Charles Darwin combined with a modern knowledge of genetics based on the work of Gregor Mendel. Darwin observed there is a certain amount of variation of traits or characteristics among the different individuals belonging to a population. Some of these traits confer fitness—they allow the individual organism that possesses them to survive in their environment better than other individuals who do not possess them and to leave more offspring. The offspring then inherit the beneficial traits, and over time the adaptive trait spreads through the population. In twentieth century, the development of the science of genetics helped explain the origin of the variation of the traits between individual organisms and the way in which they are passed from generation to generation. This basic model of evolution has since been further refined, and the role of **genetic drift** and **sexual selection** in the evolution of populations has been recognized. Life on Earth is thought to have evolved in three stages. First came chemical evolution, in which organic molecules were formed. This was followed by the development of single cells capable of reproducing themselves. This stage led to the development of complex organisms capable of sexual reproduction. Evolution is generally accepted as fact by scientists today, although debates continue over the precise mechanisms involved in the process.

As such, we see that evolution claims, in varying forms, that species develop, and undergo changes according to those characteristics which are more beneficial. For example, I was born with good night vision, and my brother was not. And then, by chance the sun was made dim by some process of nature, and electricity by coincidence had ceased to function, then I would be at an advantage. And if, food had to be searched out, then only I with my night vision would locate the food and survive, whereas my genetically inferior brother would die of starvation. Then perhaps I would take a wife, and mate, and my children would survive via my genetic advantage. That in an extremely simplistic manner is evolution. That natural selection “perfects” species to their environment.

Creationism on the other hand, for a number of reasons that shall be discussed later, denies any “work” on behalf of nature, and as such everything is precisely the way God created it to be. It is literal understanding of the Scriptures, that God created all things in six days. For if God was found not to have created in exactly six days of twenty-four hours, then surely Scripture lies, and this can not be the case, for Scripture can not be broken. Thus, for the creationist, to admit evolution would be to discount the truth of Scripture, and hence the

truth of God. This concept of creationism was begun, and is prevalent, in the various Protestant “churches”. But we shall see that creationism is no literal understanding of the scriptures, but rather, a narrow reading of the scriptures.

Having defined the various terms, what then do we as Orthodox Christians believe? Is it evolution or is it creationism?

The Context

The first point that should be considered is this: Science is science, and faith is faith. To take one from its rightful place, and to place it in a different and improper scope, is to take away and confuse its function. For example, if I was to take a piano and try to use it as a computer, I would not get very far. This simple scenario is exactly the problem with the current debate of science and faith. The spheres of science and faith, are by their very nature extremely different. This does not deny that they may function in harmony, only that they are separate.

Thus, Scripture, which was not written as a scientific handbook, rather simply does not care about science. Why do we reduce the Word of God to a theory of science? The function of the Church is not to write science, nor to dispute its theories. The function of the Church is to communicate the Truth of God to its faithful, revealing to them the Life that is possible with God. If, and only if, that Truth is impinged upon, then should the Church state its view on science.

Hence, the first conclusion is that creationism, at the outset, is a misplaced theory. For it makes faith the writer of science. At no point does the Church dictate theories in science, at no point does the Church hold scientific theories. That is, the place of the Church is not to ascribe to one scientific theory or another, but rather to teach and show the Life with God. The moment the Church enters the scientific arena, it immediately places itself in an incorrect function, and no longer serves its purpose. This is the principle error in the scientific theory of creationism.

The second conclusion is that, only if the Truth of the Church is attacked should it respond. The Church’s response in humility, is not to attack but rather to present its Truth, and its disagreements with the particular attacking theory. That is, should a scientific theory develop that is at odds with the teaching of the Church, then the Church should state its teaching, and present to the believers the reason for the rejection of the scientific theory. This does not require the Church to form a contra-scientific theory, but rather only to disagree with the theory. This has been the case from the beginning of the Church, where some Churches have failed to see this has led to travesties of that of Galileo and the like. The place of the Church is in the realm of Life with God, its place is not in government nor in science. Though, there is most benefit when there is harmony between Church and the other.

Roots of Creationism

If we look we shall see that the flaw of creationism is the same flaw that plagues western theology. That is, “salvation by faith alone”. This principle, which is interpreted in varying ways, essentially means that it is God alone who works. In more technical terms, this is a purely *mystical theology*, that is, life/knowledge/experience with God takes place only through the action of God. This idea finds its roots in St. Augustine’s reaction to Pelagius (Pelagius claimed that man was entirely responsible for his salvation), and later in the protestant reformers reaction to an apparently “legalistic” Catholic Church.

Rather, to true and authentic knowledge of God, God must work, and so must man. This is a synergy of *ascetical theology* (the work of man in coming to know God) and *mystical theology* (the work of God in revealing Himself to man).

Thus, if western theology is unable to accept that man partakes in a synergy with God for his salvation, then how can western theology accept that the earth may also work with God in creation? Creation itself is a synergy, the earth partakes in the various energies of God, the least of which is CREATIVITY. As such having seen the inherent difficulties entailed in creationism, let us see whether evolution is indeed, contradictory with the Church.

The Solution

For a solution, let us return to the beginning – literally. In the first chapter of the book of genesis a number of things become clear. The first is that there are two types of directives that God issues in creation. The first begins with the creation of the earth: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. (Gen. 1:1). This first directive, if we follow it a little closer, has a number of things involved with it. In verse 11 and 24 we find that:

11 Then God said, “**Let the earth bring** forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.

24 Then God said, “**Let the earth bring forth** the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind”; and it was so. 25 And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good.

The striking thing is this: It is not written that "God created grass," but, "Let the earth bring forth grass." It is not written that "God created living creature," but, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature." However, it should be noted that in verse 25, that "God made the beast of the earth according to its kind", indicating to us that it was indeed God who created, but not directly but by allowing the earth to "bring forth. This is the first type of directive in creation, if you like, the *indirect creation*. That is, God creates grass, herbs, living creatures, through the action of the earth. The earth itself then plays a role in creation. As such, in so much as evolution may claim that species evolve, and that the original organisms lead to higher species etc, the Bible does not seem to be in contradiction.

St. Basil the great is remarkably clear on the concept some 1700 years ago:

Formerly God had said: “Let the waters bring forth crawling creatures that have life,” here, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures.” Is the earth, then, possessed of life? And do the mad-minded Manichaeans hold the advantage, since they assume that the earth has a soul? **No, when he said, “Let it bring forth,” it did not produce what was stored up in it, but he who gave the command also bestowed upon it the power to bring forth.**

Professor of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, Archbishop Michael (Mudyugin) writes:

"The process of evolution of the organic world belongs to the category of phenomena in whose description in the Bible and in the pages of any biology textbook it is easy to see an amazing degree of similarity. The biblical terminology itself fits into the same surprising coincidence — it is said: "Let the water bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life." "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beast of the earth after his kind." Here the verb "bring forth" points to the link between distinct phases in formation of the animal world, moreover, to the connection between nonliving and living matter."

More specifically, the Church, claims, as far as has been revealed by God in Genesis, that God created the earth, and in some manner this earth through the direction of God brought forth other forms of plant and animal life. The exact process in which this was done is not revealed in scripture. As such, as we have seen previously, it is not the Church's place to form a scientific theory. All that the Church claims is that God created the earth, and the earth was granted the grace of participating in creation.

If the participation, was indeed evolution, then so be it. For this does not contradict scripture. If you like, the Church has the capability to reject scientific theory if it contradicts scripture, but at no point does it affirm scientific theory. It has the obligation to say "no", but it is unnecessary for it to say "yes" to a scientific theory, as the Church should not be reduced to a scientific organization. In this manner, it cannot reject the scientific theory of evolution, for it does not contradict scripture. But neither does it affirm evolution to be the mean by which God created.

In other words, the Church does not form scientific theory but merely rejects that which is contrary to it. Professor Alexey I. Osipov, of the Moscow Theological Academy supposes:

"For theology, both the creationist and evolutionary hypotheses are permissible, in principle. That is with the condition that in both cases the Lawgiver and the Creator of the world is God. All existing species He could create either by "days," at once and in final form, or gradually, in the course of "days" to "bring them forth" from water and earth, from lower forms to the highest by way of laws that He built into nature."

As we have seen previously, scientific theory is extremely varied, even in the concept of evolution. We have seen that evolution does not contradict scripture. There is one exception, however, that of the **evolution of man**. Earlier, we saw that first directive of creation, whereby God did not create each blade of grass, but rather created the earth and granted the earth the power "bring forth" grass. How then did God create man? In verse 27 of the first chapter of Genesis it is written:

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Unlike the other directives of creation, this is simply a *direct directive*. God wished to create man, so He created him. There is no talk of "let the earth bring forth man", but simply "So God created man". This, therefore, does not lend itself to a theory of evolution of man. There is no room for evolution. As such, the Church may not say "yes" to evolution as the way that God created creatures. It can however say that evolution was a possible means of creation, that is, it can choose not to say "no". In the case of the human, the Church and scripture are extremely clear: the answer is no. God endows the earth with the energy of participating in bringing forth plant and animal life, that is, an indirect directive. But as for the human, the scriptures reveal a direct directive, that God alone creates man.

Prof. Ivan M. Andreev, having rejected the idea that man evolved from monkey, says:

"In everything else, Darwinism does not contradict the biblical teaching on the creation of living things because evolution does not address the question of who created the first animals."

Father Andrey, an Orthodox thinker on creation tells us:

Of all the living creatures, God creates *only* man in a special way, not by way of commanding the earth or the waters. Earth's ability to respond is apparently finite: earth is unable to bring forth man. The crucial transition between animal and man occurs not by way of God's command but by His direct act. Even this creation of the "physiological vessel" capable of accommodating human conscience and freedom is not the end of the creation of man: a second stage of the biblical anthropogenesis follows — the "breathing in" of the spirit of life. The emergence of life in the Book of Genesis is both evolutionary (as earth is producing plants and simple organisms), and also a "leap towards life," occurring by the order of God.

In conclusion then, how did God create life? By creating the earth and the heavens and the waters, and allowing them to participate in creation. The exact process by which such things took place is known, it may have been creationism (but this theory has many flaws), or it may have been a non-human evolution, or it may have been other theories such guided randomness, or intelligent design, or whatever science thinks up on a daily basis. The point is unless it contradicts faith, the Church could not care less. The Church does not reduce itself to articles in journals of science. The Church cares not for scientific theory, its principal care is revealing and living the Truth of the Word, from generation to generation.

APPENDIX

SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS:

GOD, NOT THE SUN, CREATED DAY. CHRYSOSTOM: He created the sun on the fourth day lest you think it is the cause of the day. HOMILIES ON GENESIS 6.14.¹⁴

PLANTS CREATED THROUGH THE WORD. BASIL THE GREAT: When the earth heard, “Let it bring forth vegetation and the fruit trees,” it did not produce plants that it had hidden in it; nor did it send up to the surface the palm or the oak or the cypress that had been hidden somewhere down below in its womb. On the contrary, it is the divine Word that is the origin of things made. HEXAEMERON 8.1.³

CREATED BY GOD IN THE EARTH. BASIL THE GREAT: Formerly God had said: “Let the waters bring forth crawling creatures that have life,”² here, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures.” Is the earth, then, possessed of life? And do the mad-minded Manichaeans hold the advantage, since they assume that the earth has a soul? No, when he said, “Let it bring forth,” it 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,”³ produce plants that it had hidden in it... On the contrary, it is the divine Word that is the origin of things made. “Let the earth bring forth”—meaning not let it put forth what it already has but let it acquire what it does not have, since God is enduing it with the power of active force. HEXAEMERON 8.1.⁴

¹⁴ ¹⁴ FC 74:85; PG 53:58.

³ ³ FC 46:117.

² ² Gen 1:20.

³ ³ Gen 1:11.

⁴ ⁴ FC 46:117.