

EVOLUTION AND GENESIS 2–3: THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ADAM AND EVE

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I. Evolution and Genesis 2–3 in Orthodox Thought and Worship

*The Lord God formed man [anthropos, LXX] of dust from the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and man became a living being (Gen 2:7).*

1. *Genesis and Later Glosses*

From the outset it is necessary to disconnect the actual Biblical account of the creation of humanity in Genesis 2–3 from later glosses—added interpretations that have seemed inseparable from the text itself. In fact, the glosses are more problematic than what Genesis actually says. In the second Genesis account of human creation, God placed the first created human, Adam, in the Garden of Eden, with one constraint, not to eat of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17), and two tasks, to “tend and keep” the garden, and to name the “living creatures” (Gen 2:15; 19). God then creates a woman, Eve, as a “helper” or companion for Adam. Eve succumbs to the temptation of the serpent to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and she offers it to Adam, who also eats the fruit (Gen 3:1–6). As a result of this transgression, their eyes “are opened,” they immediately become “aware that they were naked,” they attempt to hide from God, and God tells them that they must suffer the consequences of their transgression and expels them from the Garden (Gen 3:7–24).

1 I am very grateful to Peter Bouteneff, Fr Georges Leroy, Elizabeth Theokritoff, George Theokritoff, and Gayle Woloschak for their reflections on earlier drafts of this article and to Barry Vanderhorst for his thoughtful insights on the relationship of Genesis to modern science.

The most important “add-ons” (more accurately, interpretations) to the actual Genesis account for our purposes are that Adam and Eve were immortal from the time of their creation, that they became mortal as a result of their transgression of the divine commandment, and that they transmitted this mortality to their descendents. Another gloss extends this line of thought even further: there was no death at all in the “original creation”; but as a result of the Adamic transgression, death entered the world as a whole, and the Fall had cosmic consequences, not only for humanity—all creation became mortal and hostile to humans because of their transgression of God’s commandment. This is a broad extension of God’s statement to Adam and Eve after the transgression, to the effect that “cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17). Other typical add-ons to the original text are that Adam and Eve were “perfect” and that they enjoyed a state of bliss and communion with God before their transgression.

The notion of a primordial, initial state of bliss, “that unity of being and meaning which is the sacred,”² of the first human ancestors is deeply ingrained in the Christian consciousness and certainly in traditional and contemporary Orthodox theology and in Orthodox liturgy. One is hard put to find a twentieth-century Orthodox theologian who does not take for granted the existence of such a “Paradise” in which the “first parents” were placed and from which they were expelled as a result of the “ancestral sin,” thereby introducing death into the world—beginning with the deaths of the first ancestors (although Adam died many centuries after the expulsion from Eden). The idea that decay and death were introduced into creation by the sin of the first ancestors is an important and almost universal facet of the Paradise account as seen by modern Orthodoxy. Yet Orthodox theology has never accepted the notion of “original sin” in the sense that the *guilt* of the first parents is somehow transmitted to all their descendents—to the entire human race. Traditional Orthodox theology has held that

2 Paul W. Kahn, *Out of Eden: Adam and Eve and the Problem of Evil* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 119.

what is transmitted as a result of “the ancestral sin” is the *consequences* of the sin, notably attachment to materiality, an inclination toward evil, and of course decay and death.

In terms of cosmological and biological evolution, the major problem of the Paradise account is precisely that the idea of a period when decay and death did not exist in the world does not correspond with scientific findings. Indeed, change, decay, and death are built into the very structures of cosmological and biological existence and evolution: the reproduction of organisms, generally followed by the death of the parent or parents (a plant, an animal, a human—or even a star or galaxy) opens the possibility that the successors will be different in some way.³ If there were no death, but individual beings simply lived on, there would be no possibility of cosmological or biological evolution, reproduction of living beings would be unnecessary or else the earth would be overrun with individuals of the same species. Death is just as much a condition or an essential instrument of evolution as changes of state in response to vast cosmological forces, such as gravity, and to reproduction, in the case of living beings.

Where then does this leave the Genesis account of the first humans in a Paradise, the Garden of Eden, from which they were expelled for having transgressed divine precepts? It certainly leaves the story in a kind of hermeneutic limbo. One approach would eliminate the problem by saying that “Genesis and modern science are not talking about the same thing.” Well, then, what is Genesis talking about? Before exploring alternative approaches to Paradise and the Fall, we will look at their presence in Orthodox liturgy, which goes a long way to shaping the Orthodox mindset on evolution.

3 “Death” does not have the same signification for all living organisms. While many organisms have “old age” induced death, many do not. Single-cell organisms and other simple life forms, such as bacteria and algae, which reproduce by cellular division, “die” only when they exhaust nutrients or as a result of other negative environmental factors. “Death” as conventionally understood applies mainly to organisms that reproduce sexually.

2. Adam and Eve and the Fall in Orthodox Liturgy

There is no specific Orthodox dogma in a strict sense concerning the creation of humanity. The closest to a dogmatic definition of the creation of humanity is the first article of the Nicene Creed: "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth..." By implication this divine creation includes humans. Although the modalities of human creation are not spelled out dogmatically, they of course have been the subject of extensive patristic and theological reflection, which typically takes as its point of departure the Genesis account of creation, the Garden of Eden, the sin of the first parents and their expulsion from Paradise. The most formal enshrinement of Genesis and of subsequent Christian readings of the Genesis story of the origins of humanity in Orthodox tradition occurs in Byzantine liturgical services. The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom contains indirect allusions to the Genesis account, with both historical and allegorical readings of the Fall:

O Holy God, ... you have brought all things out of nothing into being. You have created man (*anthropos*) in your image and likeness and adorned him with all the gifts of your grace [historical reading, from the prayer of the Trisagion].

You brought us into being out of nothing, and when we fell, you raised us up again. You did not cease doing everything until you led us to heaven and granted us your kingdom to come [allegorical reading, from the eucharistic prayer or anaphora].

The magnificent eucharistic canon of the Liturgy of Saint Basil contains an explicit reference to the creation of humanity, the Genesis story, and the introduction of sin and death into the world:

Having made man by taking dust from the earth, and having honored him with your own image, O God, you placed him in a garden of delight, promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of your commandments. But when he disobeyed you, the true God who had created him, and was led astray by the

deception of the serpent becoming subject to death through his own transgressions, you, O God, in your righteous judgment, expelled him from Paradise into this world, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in your Christ. [...] Since through man sin came into the world and through sin death, it pleased your only begotten Son, who is in your bosom, God and Father, born of a woman, the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary; born under the law, to condemn sin in his flesh, so that those who died in Adam may be brought to life in him, your Christ.⁴

The first part of this reference to Genesis adheres closely to the actual biblical account, whereas the second part picks up the core of the Pauline theme of death in Adam and restoration to life through Christ. The allegorical extension of the Fall to all humanity is alluded to indirectly: “so that those who died in Adam”—presumably all of Adam’s descendents—might be “brought to life” in Christ.

Many, if not a majority of Orthodox liturgical texts treat the Fall as a historical event. The Fall of Adam and Eve resulted in not only personal consequences, notably their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and their own death, but had cosmological consequences on all of their descendents, especially the introduction of death into the human race and indeed into the world as a whole. The Fall is ascribed to both Adam and Eve, either together or, more typically, separately, especially to Adam, although some texts ascribe the fault to Eve. To take a few typical examples:

Because Adam, our first father, transgressed your commandment, O Christ, you expelled him from Paradise ... (Beatitudes, Sunday, Tone 3; *Octoèque*, 206B).⁵

Adam, the first man, tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree and found death ... (Ode 7 of Wednesday Matins, Tone 6; *Octoèque*, 510B).

4 Translations online: <www.goarch.org/chapel/liturgical_texts/liturgy_hhc> and www.goarch.org/en/chapel/liturgical_texts/basil.asp (6 Apr 13).

5 The liturgical texts are taken from the French versions, especially Denis Guillaume, tr., *Paraclitique ou Grand Octoèque* (Rome: Diaconie apostolique, 1995).

For having tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree, the first man became subject to corruption, condemned to lose his life shamefully; he transmitted this evil to the whole human race, ... (Ode 7, Matins of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14; *Ménée de septembre*, 168).

The entire human race was condemned to the dust of the tomb by the fault of the first woman who long ago tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree ... (Ode 1, Friday Matins, Tone 6; *Octoèque*, 529B).

Most liturgical texts are not content to see Adam expelled from Paradise, but go on to employ the Pauline “typological” notion of the “first Adam” and the “Second Adam,” Christ, contrasting his salutary actions with those of Adam, frequently putting into parallel as well the first tree, that of the forbidden fruit, with the “tree” (or “wood”) of the Cross: by the Tree of the Cross, Christ, the “new Adam,” delivers humanity from the curse brought about by the first Adam and the first tree. Texts that refer specifically to Eve usually contrast her with the Mother of God. Picking up some of the examples cited above, the full texts read as follows:

Adam, the first man, tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree and found death; but Christ, the new Adam, put to death on the tree of the Cross, gives us immortal life by putting to death the industrious enemy.

For having tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree, the first man became subject to corruption, condemned to lose his life shamefully; he transmitted this evil to the whole human race, as leprosy eats away the entire body; but we mortals, who have found our salvation in the wood of the Cross, cry out: Blessed are you, Lord of Glory, God of our Fathers and our God.

The entire human race was condemned to the dust of the tomb by the fault of the first woman who long ago tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree; but we were recalled from the tomb thanks to you, Pure Virgin who conceived the Life that never passes away.

A few liturgical texts ascribe cosmic consequences to the first sin, the introduction of death into creation as a whole, and again it is the Second Adam and the second tree which restore fallen humanity, not abolishing death, but opening the way to resurrection and life eternal:

The forbidden tree brought death into the world; the tree of the Cross brings forth immortal life; thus we adore you, Crucified Lord. May the light of your Face shine upon us, O Lord. (Aposticha of Tuesday evening Vespers, Tone 3; *Octoèque*, 231A).

Some liturgical texts adopt an allegorical reading of the Genesis story: Adam is a figure of every human being; every man is Adam; I am Adam; my sin has condemned me to death:

Having eaten the forbidden fruit, I then knew death and, moved by the counsel of the serpent, alas, I excluded myself from the Glory of God; but if sin has debased me to the misfortune of death, O Lover of humankind, you the only merciful One, grant that I may once again inhabit Paradise. (Lucernaria of Friday evening Vespers, Tone 1; *Octoèque*, 86A)

In the middle of Eden a tree produced death, in the middle of the earth a tree brought forth life; tasting of the first, we experienced corruption, and from the second we gained access to immortality, because, you, O God, save the human race on the Cross.

Long ago in Paradise the enemy despoiled me; making me taste of the fruit of the tree, he introduced death. But the tree of the Cross was planted on earth, vesting humans with the robe of immortality and the whole world is overflowing with joy ... (Kathismata of Wednesday Matins, Tone 8; *Octoèque*, 682).

As might be expected, allegorical interpretation of the Paradise account is especially dominant in the liturgical texts for the Sunday “of the Expulsion of Adam from Paradise” (or “Forgiveness Sunday”). Some typical troparia from the Canon at Matins:

Because I stretched forth my hand toward the tree of knowledge, I tasted of the fruit that the Lord had forbidden me to eat, and, as the price of my foolhardiness, I was excluded from the Glory of God.

The enemy, jealous of my former happiness, in his hatred of humankind, took the form of a serpent to make me fall from Paradise and to separate me from the divine Glory. (Canon of Forgiveness Sunday; *Triode de carême*, 80B).

In summary, Byzantine-rite liturgical texts which refer to Adam and Paradise offer either a historical reading of Genesis or an allegorical interpretation, sometimes in the same service. Allegorical readings do not supplant literal or historical readings—often both occur in the same service—but rather add a layer of interpretation which personalizes the reflection as pastoral or spiritual nourishment for the faithful.

3. Evolution and Genesis in Modern Orthodox Thought

The Genesis account of the first humans, the Garden of Eden, the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise are deeply ingrained in Orthodox consciousness, not least because they feature prominently in many Orthodox liturgical services. The challenge to a literal reading of Genesis posed by science, especially modern theories of cosmology and evolution, have not gone unnoticed in Orthodox circles, but few Orthodox theologians venture into the treacherous waters of science-theology relationships, and the results are not always felicitous. By ignoring or sidestepping the findings and theories of modern science that impinge on aspects of faith, implicitly many Orthodox theologians appear to apply the NOMA paradigm advocated by Stephen Jay Gould, a popular Darwinian author: science and religion each occupies its own non-overlapping *magisterium* (NOMA) or field of authority, hence no conflict.⁶ This

6 Gould elaborates his notion notably in *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002). He writes: “The *magisterium* of science covers the empirical realm: what the Universe is made of (fact) and why does it work in this way (theory). The *magisterium* of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value. These two *magisteria* do not overlap, nor do they

paradigm is itself problematic since it too sidesteps the problem of overlap, especially concerning the origin and nature of humans, and appears to overstep if not transgress a basic philosophical and theological premise, the unity of truth, or, more fundamentally perhaps, the unity of being: there is a unity of truth or existence underlying various expressions or representations which seek to describe the same reality from different perspectives. The antinomic premise to NOMA is unity of truth in manifold expression: at some fundamental level science and theology are addressing the same reality, for example the nature of the human being, and ultimately they must be reconciled in the One Spirit of Truth.

A number of Orthodox theologians have attacked evolution, maintaining a literal interpretation of Genesis, generally from a “young-earth creationist” perspective.⁷ The most prominent effort has been that of Fr Seraphim Rose, an American convert to Orthodoxy, who wrote a number of texts in the 1970s and 1980s against evolution; these were gathered together and published in 2000 as a 700-page volume under the title *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision*.⁸ Most of the texts in the book are highly polemical, attacking not only evolution and evolution scientists, but also Orthodox who espouse “Christian evolutionism.” Rose considers evolution as a “philosophy” put forward in an atheistic onslaught on Christianity, totally contrary to the Bible as the word of God and to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. Rose’s “fundamentalist” reading of Scripture sees the Genesis story of Creation, Paradise, and the Fall as an accurate

encompass all inquiry.” *Rocks of Ages*, 6. In practice, Gould and other metaphysically-inclined scientists such as Richard Dawkins and Stephen Hawking pass well beyond the scientific realm to arrive at metaphysical conclusions (“God is not necessary”), leaving, at best, only moral questions to the “religious *magisterium*.”

7 Our discussion here makes no pretense to include all Orthodox theologians who have expressed themselves on evolution, but rather to present the views of writers representative of a range of opinions.

8 Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man: The Orthodox Christian Vision* (Platina, CA: St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000). George Theokritoff and Elizabeth Theokritoff have written a lengthy and detached review article of this book under the title “Genesis and Creation: Towards a Debate,” *SVTQ* 46:4 (2002): 365–90.

historical account of real people, Adam and Eve, and of real events. In this view, modern science, cosmology, geology and evolution, are simply so much unproved and improvable science fiction, or put more gently, scientific “theories,” not “facts.” The earth is not billions of years old, but about six to seven thousand years old, ten thousand at best, based mainly on the chronologies and genealogies given in the Bible.

Another Orthodox anti-evolutionist, Constantine Cavarnos, also attempts to undermine evolution, both Lamarkian and Darwinian, drawing mainly on outdated nineteenth and early twentieth-century scientific, philosophical, and theological criticisms of evolution.⁹

Both Rose and Cavarnos are concerned primarily to defend the “purity” of Orthodoxy from the “contamination” represented by evolution, seen as inherently atheistic and incompatible with Orthodoxy. Like other Christian fundamentalists, their starting point is a literal approach to the Bible in general and to Genesis in particular, on the basis of which they conclude that the theory of evolution must be erroneous. From the outset they fail to grasp or to recognize the nature of scientific theory, assimilating it to “philosophy”; and their use of science to attack evolution is at best shaky, at times outright false.¹⁰

Some modern Orthodox theologians recognize the problem of the relation of Genesis to evolution, but by and large do not deal with it. Nonna Verna Harrison, at the beginning of an essay on Orthodox anthropology, expresses an awareness of the problem:

Theological anthropology begins from the first three chapters of Genesis. People today wonder what the historical value of these stories is, given that science tells us another narrative about human origins. Yet when Orthodox theologians have read Genesis 1–3 they have looked for answers to questions

9 Constantine Cavarnos, *Biological Evolutionism* (Brookline, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1997).

10 On Seraphim's Rose's erroneous use of science, see Theokritoff and Theokritoff, “Genesis and Creation,” 376–78.

about humanity here and now, not about our ancient ancestors ... Adam represents every human person.¹¹

The final remark suggests an allegorical reading of the Genesis story of the first humans, yet in subsequent references to Genesis, Harrison treats Genesis as a record of actual historical events with momentous consequences—all human beings are subject to the consequences of the Fall. She and many other Orthodox theologians speak of the Fall as having affected the entire cosmos; she writes, for example:

Adam and Eve were tempted to make themselves gods apart from God (Gen 3:5), and so they used their Godlike freedom for unwise purposes. As a result, all human beings, like their first parents, live in a fallen condition.¹²

Thus after the initial suggestion of an allegorical reading of the Genesis story, the author treats the Paradise account essentially as a historical event.

Other Orthodox thinkers, while recognizing the validity of a theory of evolution, attempt to defend the integrity of the Genesis account of Paradise and the Fall. This places them in the unenviable position of trying to accommodate in a single conceptual framework seemingly irreconcilable positions, such as the age of the universe and of the earth—six to ten thousand years (from the Bible), or billions of years (from science)—a daunting intellectual task. Their solutions are imaginative, but not very convincing. Creationists of all persuasions have, of course, been “creative” in coming up with explanations to account for the apparent discrepancy between scientific data (as distinct from scientific theory, such as evolution), notably the age of the earth, and Genesis. Among the solutions advanced are that the “days” of Genesis 1 are not 24-hour days, but represent billions of years, since God is “beyond time” (this is the “day-age theory” popular with “old earth creationists”); and

11 Nonna Verna Harrison, “The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God,” in Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 78.

12 Harrison, “The Human Person ...,” 81.

that geological and fossil records (which have yielded most of the data supporting the age of the earth) is the result of the Noatic flood. Another explanation is “creation with appearance of age”: God created everything in full maturity and seemingly old, which accounts for data purporting to date the universe and the earth at billions of years (popular among “young-earth creationists”).

Sergius Bulgakov was perhaps the first major Orthodox theologian to wrestle in depth with the relationship of evolution to the traditional theology of creation, Paradise, and the Fall. In *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945), Bulgakov affirms both the veracity of the biblical story and a “certain approximate and relative truthfulness” of the scientific picture of the world’s development.¹³ He reconciles the apparent contradictions between these two approaches to the world and especially to the appearance of humanity by postulating that the events described in Genesis belong not to empirical history, but to “meta-history,” “beyond the limits of this world,” and that consequently no empirical traces of Eden or primal human perfection can be found.¹⁴ Evolution can account for the development of a humanlike animal, “this splendid animal,” “this perfect animal,” but the appearance of the human spirit, the divine “image and likeness,” is the result of “an express and new divine act that is *outside* the evolutionary process.”¹⁵ Thus the first human was indeed marked by original perfection, placed in a divinely-created “garden,” in which he transgressed the divine commandment and from which he was exiled to the natural world, subject to evolution and death, known by science.

Along the lines of Bulgakov’s distinction between “empirical history” (or science) and “meta-history,” two recent essays by Orthodox set out new theories which seek to reconcile scientific data and Genesis. Iosif Bena, a theoretical physicist, starts with the observation that God is “beyond time, and that he creates time

13 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* [in Russian, 1945] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 168.

14 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 170–71.

15 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 174; 180.

itself. Hence, the divine act of creation is not ‘in time,’ but ‘beyond time.’”¹⁶ The question of the relationship between divine eternity and time in creation is certainly a thorny one, and Bena’s starting point is sound; but the problem comes when he extrapolates “God’s timelessness” to mean that this timelessness is somehow imposed on cosmic time: “Changes in creation (such as the Fall, the Flood, or the Second Coming) affect creation in its entirety—past, present and future.” This means that the Fall affected not only humanity (and the cosmos) *after* the Fall, but also *before* the Fall, as did the Noatic Flood. He advances that there was no death before the Fall, and that between the Fall and the Flood humans lived much longer than at present (*vide* Genesis). He writes:

The drastic changes of creation that happened as a result of the Fall or of the Flood did not affect the universe only from some time onwards ... rather these changes affected the universe in its entire spatio-temporal extent: their effect went both forward in time and backwards in time.

Vladimir de Beer, in a paper which contains a useful overview of both Christian thinking on creation and evolutionary thought, sets out in conclusion a “hypothetical synthesis.”¹⁷ The main feature of this hypothesis is to consider the two accounts of human creation in Genesis 1–2 as two distinct phases of the emergence of modern humans.¹⁸ In the first account, the “Hexameron,” God creates humans, male and female, on the sixth day as the crowning point of creation (Gen 1:27), the seventh day being the day of divine rest, the Sabbath (Gen 2:2–3). In the second account, God creates Adam specially out of the “dust of the earth” (Gen 2:7); Adam is not merely the culmination of the progressive creation of increasingly more complex creatures as in Genesis 1. The Genesis

16 Isif Bena, “Creation, Genesis and Time,” unpublished paper communicated by the author.

17 Vladimir de Beer, “Genesis, Creation and Evolution.” Online at www.orthodoxytoday.org/OT/view/de-beer-genesis-creation-and-evolution (6 Apr 13).

18 In our paper, we set aside the thorny question of the relationship between the two accounts of creation contained in Genesis 1–2. Without ignoring entirely Genesis 1, our focus is primarily on Genesis 2, which contains the Paradise story.

wording does indeed suggest that a pre-existing being was infused with the divine breath to become “a living being.” From this de Beer concludes, like Bulgakov, that “Adam and Eve were not the first humans, but rather the first to receive a divine revelation and thus obtain a God-consciousness.” Thus the Paradise drama did indeed take place some six thousand or so years ago, even though *Homo sapiens* made his debut on the paleontological stage much earlier, perhaps as long ago as 400,000 years.¹⁹

While the Bulgakov, Bena, and de Beer solutions appear to reconcile science and Genesis, they raise problems of their own. In the first place, they are “a-scientific” or “meta-scientific” theories, incapable of being either proved or disproved by scientific methods; they are in effect philosophical hypotheses—“meta-historical” as Bulgakov frankly recognizes.²⁰ Bena’s idea turns God into a sort of “cosmic magician”—“now you see it, now you don’t—adjusting time backwards and forwards in accordance with human actions. Both the Bulgakov and the de Beer approaches have the advantage, critical for most Christian evolutionists, of preserving divine intervention in the creation of modern humans, for de Beer not once but twice. Even though these theories may be theologically satisfying, scientifically they are non-starters, since they require divine intervention (a no-no in science—“no miracles are allowed”) and because they elevate modern humans to a sort of *homo supersapiens*, something other than the humans resulting from biological evolution.

The Bulgakov, Bena, and de Beer hypotheses are akin to other attempts to preserve the Genesis story in the context of the theory of evolution by postulating that the creation of humanity took place

- 19 Which hominoids are considered “humans” depends on the criteria for assessment. Some accept *homo habilis* (c. two million years ago) as human because of his ability to fabricate tools—but some animals also fabricate simple tools.
- 20 Much of the content of the Christian faith is “meta-scientific” or “metaphysical.” We are using the term “meta-scientific” since it suggests both a relationship to science yet a distance from it, without the baggage of the more philosophical term “metaphysical” or the decidedly more pejorative term “pseudo-scientific”—although some “creation science” is indeed pseudo-scientific.

“out of time,” that is out of evolutionary time, and that after the Fall, humanity was somehow re-inserted into the world of becoming and death known by science. As one evangelical theologian writes: “The Fall was a real event which profoundly affected the time-space world, but is inaccessible to scientific or historical research.”²¹ In the long run, such meta-historical/meta-scientific approaches—the origins of humanity were “long ago and far away”—are rootless speculations which do not really resolve the problems.

Other Orthodox thinkers have taken different approaches, seeing no conflict between evolution and belief in God as Creator. Prominent evolution geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, reflecting on biological diversity, writes:

Organic diversity becomes, however, reasonable and understandable if the Creator has created the living world not by caprice but by evolution propelled by natural selection. It is wrong to hold creation and evolution as mutually exclusive alternatives. I am a creationist and an evolutionist. Evolution is God’s, or Nature’s method of creation.²²

Gayle Woloschak, a radiology oncologist and author, considers that the creation story in Genesis should not be read as “a scientific treatise,” but rather as “a parable about two people representing humanity, giving us lessons about our relationship to each other and about our relationship with God the Creator.”²³ She takes on Orthodox critics of evolution, criticizing them in turn for a literal (and non-Orthodox) interpretation of Scripture and pointing out that they refuse to recognize that God can act in nature as well as supernaturally, that “God can act through evolution.”²⁴

21 T. A. Noble, “Original Sin and the Fall: Definitions and a Proposal,” in R. J. Berry & T. A. Noble, eds., *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges* (Leicester: Apollos, 2009), 99–129. This book contains essays by evangelical theologians, both for and against evolution.

22 Theodosius Dobzhansky, “Nothing in Biology Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution,” *The American Biology Teacher*, March 1973, www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/library/10/2/text_pop/1_102_01.html (6 Apr 13).

23 Gayle E. Woloschak, *Beauty and Unity in Creation: The Evolution of Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life, 1996), 85, 88.

24 Gayle E. Woloschak, *Beauty and Unity in Creation*, 112. See her chapter “Arguing

John Breck, in a short pastoral text, advocates an allegorical and symbolic reading of the story of Adam and Eve:

The story of Adam and Eve is in fact the story of each one of us. Because of our own rebellion, we have been expelled from Paradise, and a flaming sword now bars us from the life of beauty, peace and joy for which God fashioned us. In our garments of skin, we wander the earth, longing to rediscover and re-enter the Garden in which and for which we were created.

The Genesis account is “a kind of ‘etiological parable’: a story that explains, via mythological imagery, the activity of God from the creation of the world to specific realities and experiences in our daily life,” which more specifically reveals God “as Creator, Judge and Redeemer, who has supreme authority over life and death.”²⁵ This is useful on a personal basis but it leaves the evolution/Genesis relationship in suspension.

George Theokritoff, a geologist, in a non-polemical essay on evolution, argues that there is a fundamental congruence between on the one hand the “Fathers’ understanding of the Genesis narratives and, on the other, the scientific narrative.” This congruence is especially evident in the notion of “potentialities” in creation: both the biblical account of creation (the Hexameron), as interpreted by the major Fathers who have commented on it, and modern cosmology and the theory of evolution suggest that everything existed “in potential *in the beginning*.” For the Fathers, the newly-created “cascades of potentialities,” as Theokritoff calls them, are “to be actualized by the Creative Word of God by separation, on the successive days of creation, from the unordered mass of potentialities”; and for science, in the general evolution of matter from energy; in particular, “DNA, so essential for life and its evolution, is already latent, potentialized in the fireball of the Big

with the Critics,” 99–125, and also her article “The Compatibility of the Principles of Biological Evolution with Eastern Orthodoxy,” *SVTQ* 55:2 (2011): 209–31.

25 John Breck, “On Reading the Story of Adam and Eve” (November 2006). Online at www.oca.org/CHRIST-life-article.asp?SID=6&ID=118. See also his reflections on “Ex nihilo” (February 1, 2008 and March 1, 2008, on the same website.

Bang.” Theokritoff’s broad conclusion is that:

What we have at this point are two parallel narratives, the Patristic one and the scientific one. In each there is an initial origin of potentialities *in the beginning, ex nihilo* in the Patristic narrative, and in the fireball of the Big Bang in the scientific narrative. In each there follow cascades of potentialities actualized *seriatim*.²⁶

This is a very promising approach, situated in a framework that sees religion and science as addressing the same reality, visible creation, each from its own perspective: religion, based on revelation and faith, and science, seeking naturalistic explanations for observed phenomena. This approach, similar to that of Dobzhansky, is situated squarely within “theistic evolution,” which views modern cosmology and evolution as God’s chosen methods of creation.

Annick de Souzenelle is a French Orthodox theologian who focuses on a symbolic interpretation of the Old Testament, especially of Genesis 1–3, drawing extensively on a profound knowledge of Old Testament Hebrew as well as on Jungian depth psychology. “There never was a Mr Adam or Mrs Eve,” she is fond of saying, discounting entirely any historical or literal aspect of the Paradise account and seeking to elucidate its symbolic sense. For her, Adam and Eve represent different aspects or facets of the human person, both men and women, one on the surface, the “accomplished” aspect (symbolized by Adam), the other in the depths of the soul or the psyche, the “inner person,” awaiting full realization, the “unaccomplished” aspect (Eve and other women of the Old Testament). Only by developing the hidden depths can the person achieve his or her full potential and thereby fulfill the divine intention for that person. She likes a play on words in French: Eve is not created from Adam’s *rib* (*côte* in French), but is rather his other *side* (*côté*).²⁷ De Souzenelle’s original symbolic

26 All citations from George Theokritoff, “Evolution and Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity,” *Transdisciplinary Studies*, 1 (Bucarest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2011), 185–203.

27 See, for example *Le Féminin de l'être: Pour en finir avec la côte d'Adam* [The Feminine of Being: To Do Away with Adam’s Rib] (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), *passim*. Annick de Souzenelle has published some 15 books, none of which have been published

readings of the Bible have not been favorably received among other Orthodox theologians, even though she is one of the best-known Orthodox personalities in France.

John Zizioulas and other modern Orthodox theologians relativize a heavenly pre-fallen state and the importance of the Fall. Zizioulas rejects the view “that death came into creation as a punishment for Adam’s disobedience,” positing instead a view of creation “as being from the beginning in a state of mortality,” basically because death is a consequence of createdness: “Once we accept the doctrine of creation we are unable to find anything in this world that is not subject to death.”²⁸ For Zizioulas, death is “endemic to createdness,” because God called creation into being *ex nihilo*; more than the cessation of life in a living creature, death is a metaphysical notion of the “impulse toward the pre-creation ‘not-being.’” While denying any cosmic import of the Genesis drama, Zizioulas does not call into question the historicity of Adam or the Fall.²⁹

In summary, most modern Orthodox thinking on evolution and Genesis falls into one of three categories:

1. Rejection of evolution and other aspects of modern science which appear to be contrary to a literal reading of Scripture. Seraphim Rose is the most prominent exponent of this approach.
2. Reconciliation of evolution and Genesis by removing the creation of humanity and the Paradise account from the purview of empirical science and historiography, as put forward by Sergius Bulgakov and others.

in English. Her first and possibly most pioneering work is *Le Symbolisme du corps humain* [The Symbolism of the Human Body] (1977). Other books focus on the symbolic interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis (*Alliance de Feu*), Job, the seven plagues of Egypt, Jonah, the Hebrew alphabet, “echoes” between the Old and the New Testaments, and other aspects of personal and spiritual development.

28 John Zizioulas, “Preserving God’s Creation,” *King’s Theological Review* 12–13 (1989–90): passim.

29 John Zizioulas, “Christology and Existence: The Dialectic of Created and Uncreated and the Dogma of Chalcedon,” *Synaxi* 2 (1982), in *Synaxis: An Anthology of the Most Important Orthodox Theology in Greece Appearing in the Journal Synaxi from 1982 to 2002* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), 30, 45.

3. Relativization or outright dismissal of the historicity of the Genesis account of creation, Paradise, and the Fall, in favor of symbolic and allegorical interpretations, as exemplified by the interpretations of John Breck, Annick de Souza, and John Zizioulas.³⁰

One major difficulty with the last approach is that by and large the reflection to date does not consider the complex theological implications of dismissing the historicity of the Eden account—implications for major issues such as the origin of evil and death and original sin. Despite a number of cautious Orthodox voices who step away from a historical reading of Genesis, much modern Orthodox reflection on science and Genesis attempts to “rescue” the biblical account of creation, Paradise, the Fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden from the folktale limbo to which atheistic evolutionists try to banish it. But is it necessary to go to such lengths to prevent Adam and Eve from enjoying a well-deserved peaceful retirement?

II. The Decline and Fall of Adam and Eve

*See, I have set before you this day life and good,
and death and evil . . . therefore choose life,
that you and your descendants may live,
loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice,
and cleaving to him; for that means life to you
and length of days (Deut 30:15; 19–20).*

1. *The Garden of Eden and the Fall as Parable or Myth*

While many Fathers of the Church, liturgical texts, and modern theologians offer differing approaches to the significance of the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden, the Fall and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, there is widespread acceptance that

30 One Orthodox website groups Orthodox views on evolution into two categories: “compatibilists,” who hold that science and theology are compatible and view them as complementary revelations of God; and “incompatibilists,” who maintain that science (such as the theory of evolution and the evidence supporting it) can be incompatible with faith. There is a fundamental difference within the “compatibilist” camp, as we are suggesting in our second and third categories. See orthodoxwiki.org/Evolution.

they describe events that happened.³¹ At the same time, for most Christian writers, both ancient and modern, the actual historicity of the events described in Genesis is far less important than the moral and spiritual messages that the story conveys. Certainly the Genesis account of the events in Eden does not pass the basic litmus test of modern historicity: events for which there are sources that withstand critical investigation.

This essay assumes that a theory of evolution is essentially correct, even though some aspects of evolutionary theory (how evolution actually occurs), remain unclear.³² While “theistic evolutionists” accept some form of evolution, for many the ancient Judeo-Christian notion of a pre-historical state of bliss of humanity from which it “fell” remains a stumbling block. “The Fall is the place above all where biology and theology conflict,” writes one commentator,³³ while another postulates that for many Christians “a historical Fall is a non-negotiable article of faith.”³⁴

If Genesis 2–3 is discounted as a “history” of actual events, then we must examine the Paradise story through different spectacles. The most promising approach is to see Genesis 2–3, not as history and science, but rather as parable, metaphor, or myth.³⁵ Jewish readings of Paradise often saw the Genesis account as “a metaphor

31 The complexity of patristic treatment of Paradise to the fourth century is seen in Peter Bouteneff’s detailed study, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Even Origen is ambivalent about Paradise, mostly regarding the Genesis account as allegorical, while accepting Adam’s place in the Biblical genealogies. Cf. Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 106–12.

32 For a concise “primer” on evolution and scientific theory and method, see Gayle Wollschak, “The Compatibility of the Principles of Biological Evolution with Eastern Orthodoxy,” 209–13.

33 R. J. Berry, “Did Darwin Dethrone Humanity” in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall*, 72.

34 Henri Blocher, “Theology of the Fall and the Origins of Evil,” in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall*, 169.

35 Cf. Peter Childs, in a review of *Darwin, Creation and the Fall*: “If we read poetry as prose, theology as science, and metaphor as fact, then we will end up with the wrong conclusions. Much of the conflict between science and faith arises from misreading Genesis 1–3 in an over-literal way, without taking account of the nature and structure of the text.” < <http://www.ibi.ie/resources/articles/darwin-creation-and-the-fall-theological-challenges/> > (6 Apr 13).

representing certain profound truths and should not be interpreted literally.”³⁶ Much of Jesus’ teaching was in the form of parables, short fictitious stories, drawn mostly from objects, personages, and events of everyday life, intended to convey a profound spiritual or moral teaching. Parables are acceptable in Christianity since Jesus used them, but myths are not. Myths have a bad reputation, because even in New Testament times they were associated with paganism and the very structure of Greek and Roman religion; St Paul contrasts pagan myths with the truth of the Gospel (2 Tim 4:4, Titus 1:14 etc.). But a myth is not simply an imaginary story with no basis in reality, but is rather a complex literary genre which brings together different elements into a coherent symbolic framework to explain a thorny problem, thereby assisting its recipients to construct a viable philosophy of life. Myths convey their message at different levels of meaning, including literal (a “good story”), but the principal modes of interpretation of myths are moral and symbolic. Myths, like parables, are “‘true fictions,’ stories capable of bearing truth.”³⁷

The point of the myth is not simply to offer an explanation of our condition but to dispose the listener to take up a certain attitude toward his or her present situation. The account is not neutral. It offers meanings, not facts.³⁸

In Sallustius’ famous dictum, “myths never happened, but always are.”³⁹

It certainly requires a significant change of mindset to consider the Genesis account of Eden, the Fall, and the Expulsion from Paradise as myth in the same category as, for example, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the foundation myths of Greek civilization. From this perspective, it is important to “rescue” in the Paradise account what is essential to Christian faith, and to be prepared to jettison aspects which are not essential. In this light we will examine the Genesis account of Adam and Eve from three perspectives: literal/historical, moral/allegorical, and literary/symbolic.

36 Shubert Spero, “Paradise Lost or Outgrown?” *Tradition* 41, 2 (2008): 256.

37 Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 181.

38 Paul Kahn, *Out of Eden*, 107.

39 Sallustius, *On the Gods and the World*, XIV.

1. *Literal/historical.*

Is there a real historical basis for the Genesis account of Paradise, the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise? The example of the *Iliad* is relevant. For many centuries it was thought that the story of the Trojan Wars belonged strictly to legend, and it was not until the rise of modern archaeology that it was demonstrated that the city of Troy really existed, exactly where the *Iliad* indicated that it was located, in what is now northwest Anatolia in Turkey, close to the Dardanelles. Ancient Troy was destroyed and rebuilt a number of times, and archaeologists are still uncertain which “Troy” was the setting of the Homeric epics; but there is no doubt about the historical existence of Troy.

Is it also possible that the Genesis account of Eden has some basis in pre-literate world history? Elements of Genesis 1–3 are found in other creation accounts of the Ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamian mythology, even down to such details as a tree of life, a clever snake, and, later in Genesis, a catastrophic flood.

Genesis gives one important realistic clue about the Garden of Eden: the four rivers which are said to flow from the Garden:

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris (Hiddekel), which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Phrath). (Gen 2:10–14).

This precise naming of the rivers of Eden has guided both religious fundamentalists and academic archaeologists and historians in a search for the location of the Garden. But the geography implied by Genesis does not fit with the modern geography of the region of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—the Pishon and the Gihon are not known in modern times. This has led to speculations placing Eden in the upper reaches of the Tigris-Euphrates system; somewhere in

eastern Turkey (conveniently close to Mount Ararat); in the region around Tabriz (Iran—South Azerbaijan); in the lower reaches of the Euphrates; along the eastern shores of the Persian Gulf; or more wildly, Jerusalem, Ethiopia (“Cush”), and even Jackson County, Missouri (the Mormons).

A current hypothesis is that the Biblical account of Eden drew on memories of the existence of a well-watered prehistoric valley and plain on the lower reaches of the Euphrates, at a time when ocean levels were much lower than today. Both the Tigris and the Euphrates arise in the mountains of eastern Turkey; the two rivers flow somewhat in parallel and join to form the Shatt al-Arab some 200 kilometers from the head of the Persian Gulf. The Biblical Gihon is sometimes identified with the Karun River of Iran which flows into the Shatt al-Arab below Basra in Iraq, although the reference to “Cush” creates confusion since Cush normally refers to Ethiopia. Identifying the Pishon is more problematic still, although the name “Halivah” is a clue: Halivah (“place of sand dunes”) is generally identified with Arabia, although it could also be in ancient northeast Mesopotamia. Satellite photos of the head of the Persian Gulf show that before 4000 BC a river drained into the Persian Gulf at that area, now known as Wadi al-Rammuh and Wadi al-Batin in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, possibly the Biblical Pishon. Subsequently, it is thought, the area became much drier, the prehistoric river ceased to flow, ocean levels rose, causing the Persian Gulf to flood the fertile plains that lay to the south and east of the junction of the four rivers, forcing the inhabitants to move to higher ground.⁴⁰

40 On the Persian Gulf hypothesis, see Eric H. Cline, “From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible,” *National Geographic* (2007); Dora Jane Hamblin, “Has the Garden of Eden Been Located at Last?” (Smithsonian), ldolphin.org/eden (6 Apr 13); Benno Landsberger, “Three Essays on the Sumerians” (Undena Publications, 1984); W. Sanford, “Thoughts on Eden, the Flood and the Persian Gulf” (Annual Meeting of the American Geological Society, 2006); Farouk El-Baz, “A River in the Desert,” *Discover*, July 1993; James A. Sauer, “The River Runs Dry: Creation Story Preserves Historical Memory,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22, 4, (1996); Calvin Schlabach, “The Pishon River—Found!,” *Focus Magazine*, www.focusmagazine.org/Articles/pishonriver.htm (1 Sep 11); Juris Zarins, “The Early Settlement of South-

This geographical evidence, admittedly meager, suggests that there may well have been four rivers flowing *into* fertile valleys at the headwaters of the Euphrates near a much lower Persian Gulf. But the Biblical account states that one river flowed *out* of Eden and split into four branches. Could this simply be a symbolic representation of the four cardinal directions, meaning the entire earth? Or a speculative reconstruction of the geography by the Genesis author, living far from the area and long after the events themselves, drawing on ancient oral traditions which easily distort original events?

Although the Persian Gulf hypothesis appears to have some consistency with the scant "historical" details provided in Genesis, it remains to be seen whether this or another hypothesis will eventually be solidly confirmed by archaeological and other scientific data. Nonetheless, the existence or non-existence of a prehistoric tragedy does not infirm the relevance of other conceptual levels that may have gone into the construction of the Genesis story: we are simply suggesting here that there may well indeed have been a catastrophic prehistoric event that went into the construction of the Eden drama. Hermeneutically, it matters little if the Genesis author borrowed elements from other sources in the construction of his account: more important is the message that he intended to convey. Just as we do not read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as a biography of Caesar, we should not expect historical accuracy in the details of the Genesis account of Paradise, but at best only a general relationship to a vaguely-remembered prehistoric tragedy.

2. Moral / allegorical.

Regardless of whether or not real geography and actual prehistoric events went into the composition of Genesis 2–3, these were not the primary concern of the ancient author. The vague memories of

ern Mesopotamia: A Review of Recent Historical, Geological, and Archaeological Research," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1992). Biblical fundamentalists seize upon the possible location of the Pishon River in Arabia as "proof" of the historicity of Genesis, which is stretching the hypothesis far beyond its actual significance.

an idyllic “garden of abundance” from which humans were forced to evacuate merely provided a useful backdrop for the author’s main concern—and indeed of subsequent Christian interpreters, beginning with Paul—centered on the conveying of certain messages and teachings. If the main purpose of the Hexameron (Gen 1) can succinctly be described as presenting the “mighty works of the Lord” in creation, culminating in the creation of humans, the interest of Genesis 2–3 shifts to the human predicament, in particular the need to account for the existence of evil in the world. No doubt too the author of Genesis also wished to explain the origin of the Jewish people, tracing it to the beginnings of humanity, in a linear account which contrasts sinful humanity and divine faithfulness, signified in the successive covenants between God and humanity. God does not abandon sinful humanity but rather constantly manifests his concern for the fate of his creation, humanity as a whole (the Adamic and Noatic covenants) then focusing sharply on the Jewish people alone (the Abrahamic covenant). In this perspective the Paradise drama has to be seen not only on its own, but as a part of a wider scenario encompassing cosmic time from the initial moment of creation to the emergence of a distinctive people dedicated to the Lord God.

The Paradise account, even though it is only one act of a much larger drama, can nonetheless also be seen as a self-contained parable or myth with its own objectives or “messages.” The main theological and moral teachings of the Paradise account on its own can be briefly summarized:

1. God gave humans certain tasks to carry out and imposed one injunction on their behavior;
2. There are mysterious forces at work which incite humans to commit evil—to disobey God’s commandments;
3. Despite the existence of these forces, humans are responsible and accountable for the evil that they commit;
4. Human evil may result in consequences far beyond what could have been envisaged and indeed seemingly out of proportion to the evil itself;

5. God does not abandon humans when they stray from his commandments but provides alternate ways for them to reach their destinies.

It is but a small step from thus seeing Eden as the setting of a morality play to a more technically “allegorical” reading of the Genesis account, as we find so often in the Byzantine rite liturgy: Adam is Everyman; Eve, Everywoman; I am Adam, I am Eve; the Paradise drama is about me: I was innocent, I was tempted, I fell, I suffer the consequences—but God does not abandon me, as he did not abandon Adam and Eve, even after sanctioning their expulsion from Paradise.⁴¹ “Adam” is a symbol of sinful humanity, of “fallen” humanity, awaiting salvation in Christ.

A moral/allegorical vision of the Paradise account is a useful pedagogical device, but it has its limits isolated from other considerations. If Adam and Eve were exiled from Paradise and suffered death as a result of sin, so I too am in exile and condemned to death as a result of my sin. While I may accept this for myself, the principle of a direct connection—cause and effect—between sin and death cannot be universalized, because it raises the problem of those who die before they sin—unborn fetuses who die either naturally or by deliberate abortion, babies, young children. If death is a consequence of the sin of the individual, why do the innocent die before they sin?

This type of problem suggests that a linear reading of the Genesis story as a moral parable must be supplemented by a higher-level symbolic reading which draws in broader theological considerations.

41 Cf. Eugene Drewermann, who asserts that it is necessary “to read the story of Genesis 3:1–7 in such a way that it is the story of everyman insofar as it is the story of everyman’s guilt before God” (*Strukturen des Bösen [Structure of Evil]* III (Paderborn, 1977–78), 427. Cited in Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2006), 25. A Jewish story says that every person who dies first encounters Adam and Eve before entering Heaven and curses them: “For what YOU did, I suffered.” To which Adam replies, not defensively, but as a calm observation: “No, you suffered for what you yourself did.”

3. *Literary / symbolic.*

Genesis 2–3 can also be seen as a literary or symbolic account of the origin of evil in the world and ultimately of death. The Eden scenario becomes more complex in the light of the layers of interpretation that subsequent commentaries have added to the basic lessons contained within the story itself. The most important theological extensions of the story are that Adam's (and Eve's) transgression caused the Fall of humanity as a whole, that it is because of this that Adam and Eve suffered death (even if not immediately) and that death entered into the world, not only into humanity, but into creation as whole—the assumption being that death did not exist in the “first-created world.” Clearly the stakes are much higher here than those of a straightforward morality play which can be given an allegorical once-over.

The Genesis story of the Garden of Eden is a coherent even if not entirely consistent narrative, not lacking in dramatic elements. That it was intended to be received symbolically can be seen in its abundant symbolic elements: the names of the first parents (Adam=earth; Eve=life); the very notion of a garden (of delights, one assumes); the two trees (life and knowledge of good and evil, hardly decorative suburban trees); the talking serpent; the fruit of the tree which brings death (the “apple”); the flaming sword of the angel.

Some Fathers of the Church offer what may be a crucial clue to the re-insertion of Paradise and the Fall into a Christian narrative consistent with modern science, although this was certainly not their intention. Several early Fathers, notably Theophilus, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Clement of Alexandria, speak of the creation of humanity, of Adam and Eve, as incomplete, “like children, not yet fully developed, who partook of the intended fruit ahead of their time.”⁴² Irenaeus writes:

Man, was (but) small; for he was a child; and it was necessary that he should grow, and so come to (his) perfection. . . .

Man was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected; wherefore also he was easily led astray by the deceiver.⁴³

42 Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 87. For an analogous contemporary Jewish view, see Shubert Spero, “Paradise Lost or Outgrown?” 256–62.

43 Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12. See also *Adversus haereses*,

In the fourth century Gregory of Nazianzus develops this theme of pre-fallen humanity as “work in progress,” not perfect, but childlike, unready to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, which Gregory interprets as contemplation, *théoria*:

... Something which may only safely be attempted by those who have reached perfection in an orderly way. So it was not beneficial for those still in a state of immaturity, greedy in appetite, just as mature food does not profit those who are still infants, still in need of milk.⁴⁴

Several centuries later John of Damascus writes that the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the science or knowledge of one's own nature which reveals the greatness of the Creator: “This knowledge was too dangerous for the newly-made Adam.”⁴⁵

The idea that humans are in a process of “becoming,” biologically, noetically, and metaphysically (or spiritually), is certainly more consistent with an evolving creation as seen by modern science than a “static creation,” completely accomplished or “finished” from the moment of the arrival of the first modern humans on the scene. This notion of a dynamic creation, a cosmic process of becoming, inserts humanity into a grandiose divine scheme that one can only marvel at: the whole universe, from the Big Bang onward, leads inexorably to the emergence of a biological-noetic-metaphysical creature capable of knowing and loving its own Creator. Indeed, some Fathers, from Irenaeus onward, explicitly extend this idea further, reversing conventional linear chronology, advancing the notion “that Adam came into being as a result of Christ and his passion, that Adam was made in the image of the incarnate Christ.”⁴⁶ From this it is a small step to see the goal of evolution as not the first *homo sapiens*, but rather the Incarnation of the Logos, the assumption of human nature by “one of the Holy Trinity,” Christ as the true Adam, the recapitulation of all nations, languages and generations, the *alpha* and the *omega*. The great flow of cosmological and biological

4.38.1.

44 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 38, cited in Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 149.

45 John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, II, 11.

46 Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 176.

evolution reaches its culmination as God himself assumes the nature of his own creature: the Incarnation, the God-Man is the real purpose of evolution. In this perspective, no further evolution beyond humanity can take place, for the summit has already been achieved; there can never be a creature “higher” than human, because by the Incarnation, God assumed and divinized human nature.

On a broad symbolic level, the Eden narrative can be read as a parable of the consequences of separation from God. The “death” involved in the Genesis account is not physical death, but rather spiritual death—which is the consequence of separation from God:

The Fall is not primarily about disease and disaster, nor about the dawn of self-awareness. Rather it is a way of describing the fracture in relationship between God and the human creature made in his image.⁴⁷

While such an approach permits the acceptance of death from the first moment of creation, it nonetheless leaves us with the basic question faced by the author of Genesis: What is the origin of evil? One crucial preliminary reflection is necessary. In a strict sense, evil is a moral concept which applies only to rational beings capable of making choices among alternative behaviors. “Evil” strictly speaking does not exist in the non-human or non-conscious world—even though from a human perspective, some pretty terrible things take place—Darwin himself was deeply disturbed by what is termed “evolutionary evil,” suffering and waste in the non-human world. Do we pass a moral judgment on the lion that kills an antelope and then eats it? Or on the dominant male of many species which mates with many females, a right often won by victory in battle against other males? Moral judgments apply to rational beings. Evil certainly exists in the non-human world, but do murder, promiscuity, cannibalism, and theft? Violence and destruction by natural forces or among non-conscious beings does not entail moral responsibility; there is no moral person to which moral judgments can be applied. “Evolutionary evil” or “natural

47 R. J. Berry, “Did Darwin Dethrone Humanity?” in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall*, 70.

evil” is evil by analogy, the application of human moral principles to non-conscious or even inanimate beings.⁴⁸ At the same time, it is a measure of human compassion to recognize suffering in all of God’s creation—Darwin, for one, was deeply troubled by pain and suffering in the natural world.

The key to the origin and nature of evil lies in the concept of free will: in creating conscious beings endowed with free will, God “took the risk” that they would perhaps use this gift, a key aspect of the “divine image” in humans (cf. Gen 1:26), to turn away from him: “Evil has its cause in human freedom,” summarizes Christos Yannaras.⁴⁹ This is the true symbolic significance of the Paradise drama: endowed with freedom, Adam and Eve chose to disobey the divine commandment, preferring, on the advice of the “father of lies,” to “become god without God.” In reality, it is unlikely that moral evil as we now know it originated with

one or two human beings who themselves had scarcely emerged from the animal realm. It is more likely—and this is what the primal history recounts—that evil increased among numerous people, different cultures, and through long periods of time.⁵⁰

2. *The Origin of Death*

If, as science tells us, death in some form has existed since the emergence of life on Earth, the consciousness of death appears to be limited almost exclusively to humans. In this sense perhaps we should not talk about the “origin of death,” but rather the origin of consciousness of death. Animals experience fear in the face of

48 Cf. Raymund Schwager: “Forms of behavior we feel are evil in the animal realm can reappear among us humans in sharpened form: in the animal realm they are actually natural, but in the human realm they are evil precisely because they have their origin in freedom as well. They may not be minimized or excused because of our animal past.” *Banished from Eden*, 131.

49 Christos Yannaras, “La ‘chute’: événement historique ou réalité existentielle?” Conference at the Saint Sergius Institute of Theology, Paris, March 28, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/22198647> (6 Apr 13). More controversially, Yannaras asserts that evil in a broader sense “is a divine creation; it is a condition in God’s creation.” We take up this point later in this section.

50 Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 27.

danger, but are they really aware of their own possible imminent death? Some animals, such as elephants and possibly others such as dolphins, appear to have a certain notion of death, but perhaps also this vague awareness is limited to the deaths of their companions, rather than a keen perception that the now living will also die.

If animals have no consciousness of death, they experience life. In this light, the tree of life in the Garden of Eden is the universal experience of life.⁵¹ The tree of life, after being introduced at Genesis 2:9, almost vanishes from the Paradise account, and the tree of knowledge occupies center stage. God refers again to the tree of life at the end of the Paradise account, implying that the fruit of the tree of life grants *eternal life* (Gen 3:22). For this reason, some Fathers, such as Ephrem the Syrian, attach considerable importance to the tree of life, since it imparts the acquisition of an essential divine quality, immortality, for which Adam and Eve were unprepared. Interpreting this symbolically, perhaps the ancestors of modern humans lived in an immature stage of the development of consciousness before becoming fully conscious beings—a preliminary stage represented by Adam and Eve in Paradise before the Fall.⁵²

In the Paradise story, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is mysteriously linked with death. Is there a relationship between a moral sense of good and evil and consciousness of life and death? The names and the attributes of the trees in the Paradise story suggest a profound intuition of the close relationship between the two sets of conditions, good/evil and life/death. Genesis points twice to this intuition. God links knowledge to death, first in his warning to Adam about the consequences of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,

51 See the discussion of the tree of life in Ephrem the Syrian in Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 56–59; 79–81. On the trees in Eden see also Walter Vogels, “The tree(s) in the middle of the garden,” *Science et Esprit*, 59, 2–3 (2007).

52 Cf. Paul Kahn: “We have no reason to think that the Adam and Eve of Genesis 1 are immortal, but we have every reason to think that they lack knowledge of their mortality.” *Out of Eden*, 116.

for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 1:16–17). This is not to be seen as a threat of divine punishment, but rather as a natural consequence: along with the acquisition of the moral sense, the "knowledge of good and evil," comes, not the introduction of death, but a new-found subjective awareness of death. For Gregory of Nyssa, the tree of knowledge, although symbolic, is indeed "death-dealing," representing sin and death.⁵³ In the Genesis account, Adam does not die immediately, but only hundreds of years later: what died the day that he acquired a moral sense of good and evil was the state of innocence, where neither evil nor death existed because there was no human awareness of them.

The second intimation of a connection between good/evil and life/death occurs in God's reflection after the transgression, as he exiles Adam and Eve from Paradise:

Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever—therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. (Gn 3:22–23)

Now that Adam and Eve, the first fully-conscious humans, have knowledge of good and evil, life and death, they must live out the full consequences of their newly-acquired knowledge: there is no returning to the state of innocence—which in any case was a state in which they were not yet fully human, unaware of good and evil.

One study of the relationship of Genesis and the problem of evil states that

the key insights of the myth of the Fall [is] that the problem of evil is intimately related to, and indeed begins with, the acquisition of knowledge. In particular, it begins with knowledge of the finite character of the self.⁵⁴

This attempts to answer the question: What knowledge is Genesis referring to? Genesis 2:9 identifies the forbidden tree as "the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil." As we have seen, good and evil are moral categories which apply to human behavior but not to animal

53 Cf. Peter Bouteneff, *Beginnings*, 153–54.

54 Paul Kahn, *Out of Eden*, 9.

behavior. But knowledge of good and evil can be seen in another light, as knowledge of life and death. On a metaphysical and moral plane, the two sets of notions are closely related: life=good; death=evil.

At the same time that humans acquired awareness of life and death, of their own life and death and those of other human beings, they acquired a moral awareness. We would say today that human actions are not just a consequence of blind evolutionary “instinct,” natural and sexual selection (Darwin), DNA or “the selfish gene” (Richard Dawkins), but occur under the glare of a moral code founded on an awareness of a distinction between good and evil. This “meta-physical” awareness is God-given, “The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being,” in the words of the second creation account (Gen 2:7). As Bulgakov observed, the verse suggests that “man” existed prior to receiving the “breath of life” directly from God: yes, humans existed as evolved animals, biological humanoids, partaking of the “tree of life” in common with all animals, all living creatures, but not yet of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.”⁵⁵ It is possible to retain here an extraordinary divine intervention, essential to permit this all-crucial step to occur. Regardless of whether this was a sudden transition to human consciousness or a long drawn-out process, at this point humans truly acquire the capacity to know and to relate to God, acquiring the divine image, so dear to the Fathers, the basis of patristic anthropology, the human “spirit” and its essential concomitant, freedom—the ability to choose between good and evil—personhood, and awareness of personal existence—and of personal mortality.⁵⁶

Once humans obtained knowledge of the life-death/good-evil

55 Cf. Shubert Spero: “Human nature was, to an extent, raw, unfixed and malleable ... faculties such as reason, emotion, imagination and the sense of self could not have been brought into existence fully formed in sharply demarked compartments.” “Paradise lost or outgrown?,” 261.

56 Cf. Paul Khan: “Knowledge of good and evil is knowledge of the self, and self-knowledge is the knowledge of death.” *Out of Eden*, 116.

conundrum, symbolically in Genesis by eating of the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil,” there was no returning to the previous state of awareness of life only, typical of animals—and young children: this is truly exile from Paradise, from a state of blissful innocence which was unaware of evil and death—not that death did not exist, but there was no awareness of it.⁵⁷

If death, in its broadest sense, is indeed inherent in creation from the start—from the Big Bang—then the idea that human fault somehow caused death to enter the world should also be relegated to the backburner. As an alternative to seeing in Genesis an account of the introduction of death into the world, we are suggesting that it be seen as a symbolic re-telling of the rise of consciousness of the life-death/good-evil paradigm, with all its inherent tensions and ambiguities.

A major objection to the idea that death is built into the very structure of the cosmos is that it is inconceivable, indeed blasphemous, to assert that God created something which was not perfect, that God “created” death and evil, calling into question the perfection of God himself and his power. Death does not travel alone, because it is almost always accompanied by its comrade-in-arms, suffering. In a broad sense, “death” is itself symbolic of a broad set of conditions which includes aging, decay, disease, and suffering, and only in the final analysis, death itself. These are properties of things subject to change, of createdness itself. The human spirit has difficulty in accepting that God simultaneously created good and evil: God in his infinite goodness, it is argued, could not have created from the outset, in his original plan, a universe subject to suffering, death and destruction (note that this argument employs the paradigm life=good; death=evil). After all, does not the first Genesis creation account state repeatedly that “God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:4; 10; 12; 18; 21; 25), and that indeed the

57 In a similar vein, Paul Kahn writes: “Death is not present before the Fall, because death has no meaning for the species. Death is not an event; neither is birth. An event has a before and an after, but at creation all time is present... Human time—a measure of past, present and future—begins with the Fall.” *Out of Eden*, 38.

entire creation, including humans, was “very good” (Gen 1:31)? Therefore before the Fall, death could not have existed in this good world, because death is evil and everything that God does is necessarily good, concludes this line of thought. We can see why in this reasoning it is necessary to pin the blame on human sin for the introduction of suffering and death into the world.

The response to this objection, it seems to us, is to turn the argument on its head: the perfection of creation is precisely in change and becoming—which require death, from the death of a star, a planet, a mountain, an ocean, to that of plants, dinosaurs, animals—and humans. This is not to say that God created a world of death but to recognize God’s creation as a world of life, life which ebbs and flows and changes, as it strives for and longs after its ultimate fulfillment, which is union with God.⁵⁸ God created a *process*, not a *stasis*. Each individual link in the “great chain of being” is unique and essential—“God saw that it was good ... very good”—and God knows, loves and sustains every being in a way which surpasses our understanding: “He determines the number of the stars, he gives to all of them their names” (Ps 147:4). This is, admittedly, not fully satisfactory, since it appears to leave open the possibility that God creates the conditions that inevitably result in suffering and death, and that God is thus somehow “responsible” for suffering and death. Faced with the anguished, desperate plea “Where was God in the gulag, in Auschwitz, in the tsunami, in the death of my child ... ?,”⁵⁹ philosophical and moral platitudes such as “evil has no substantial existence” or “it is the will of God” pale into insignificance and are cold and callous. The only Christian responses to the question “Where was God ... ?” are, it seems to us, that God

58 Awe in the face of the power and the beauty of creation is a religious sentiment, whether or not it is elevated to the Creator. Darwin concludes *The Origin of Species* with these words: “There is grandeur in this view of life ... from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.”

59 Charles Darwin’s religious views were profoundly affected by the death of his much-loved oldest daughter Annie in 1851 at the age of ten. It was at this time that Darwin stopped attending church.

himself at that very moment was suffering and dying on the Cross, that he was promising his disciples “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20) and that “we look to the life of the world to come” when “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), when God “will dwell with men and they shall be his people,” when “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:3–4).⁶⁰

Nor is the inevitability of death in a world of change a slight on God's omnipotence: God could have created the world differently, without suffering and death, which could appear to be more compatible with divine love. But, we suggest, such a world would necessarily impose limitations on the freedom of conscious beings—on human freedom. In creating humans endowed with self-consciousness and free will, God indicates that he is seeking the freely given love of his own creation; God wants sons and daughters, not robots. Similarly, our line of reflection does not rule out the possibility of a radically different material world from the one that we know, the Kingdom of God, “the life of the world to come,” in the words of the Nicene Creed, the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation (Rev 21:2). Christ's Transfiguration, his appearances after his Resurrection and the transfigurations, even momentary, of certain saints afford a glimpse “through a glass darkly” (1 Cor 13:12) at what such a world could be. The patristic sense of the glory and the kingly state of Adam in Paradise has an eschatological overtone, again more a vision of a world to come than a history of a world that was: “Truly, today you will be with me in Paradise,” says Jesus to the thief (Mk 23:43).

60 For modern Orthodox reflections on theodicy—the reconciliation of God's goodness and love with the presence of suffering and death in the world—see the work of David Bentley Hart, especially *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); and his articles “Tsunami and Theodicy” (*First Things*, March 2005) <www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2008/05/tsunami-and-theodicy>; and “Where Was God? An Interview with David Bentley Hart,” *The Christian Century* (January 10, 2006) <www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3301>.

That death is not the end of life, a return to non-being, is demonstrated by Christ's Resurrection. Christ enables us to enter to the true Eden, not the Eden of pre-knowledge innocence symbolized in Genesis, but that of the certainty that suffering and death are overcome in and by his Resurrection; and it is in his Resurrection that we too overcome suffering and death. As John Zizioulas writes, inspired by Athanasius (*On the Incarnation*):

The key to solving the problem of avoiding death as annihilation lies not in the nature of the creature, nor in the act of creation itself, but in the Resurrection of Christ. The Resurrection has removed from death the sting of annihilation.

Death after Christ's Resurrection is "an unfulfilled threat of annihilation."⁶¹

3. The Fall of Humanity?

Many Fathers identify two major consequences of the Fall: the introduction of decay and death into the world and a tendency of the human spirit toward sin and evil. These qualities are certainly part of the universal human experience. As we saw, some Fathers taught that Adam was not a fully accomplished being, humanity at the full development of its abilities, but rather humanity-in-potential, as a child, in a state of childhood innocence. This line of thinking opens the way toward an understanding of the narrative of the Fall which is consistent with the findings of modern science, especially evolution.

In this perspective, we can say that there was no "Fall" as a distinct, historic event with tragic cosmic consequences brought about by the sin of the first humans—but sin had a beginning: sin, the estrangement from God, is virtually cotemporaneous with free will, the acquisition of the "knowledge of good and evil," and is dependent on it. Sin or fallenness is not a necessary or coextensive element of human nature; sin did not have to be nor is it definitive of who we are.⁶² Rather, everyone who sins experiences his own

61 John Zizioulas, "Christology and existence," 44–45.

62 I am grateful to Peter Bouteneff for these reflections.

personal fall and exile from Paradise, that is, communion with God. Humans were mortal from the beginning, death is not the consequence of the sin of a first parent, but was part of the original divine creation. We must therefore understand the story of the Fall in Genesis as moral allegory and symbol, not as history. A man who sins is Adam, a woman who sins is Eve. Thus, the death of innocents (miscarriages, abortions, babies, young children) is not a scandal which calls into question divine goodness or Providence. We cannot fully know or understand all aspects of divine Providence; but in all humility, we must have confidence in divine goodness and love, that God cares for his creation, especially conscious beings in his image, in much better ways than we can ever know or imagine. Christianity, founded on the Resurrection of Christ, should not recoil from proclaiming eschatological hope in the face of seemingly meaningless suffering and death.

On a symbolic level, was the Fall akin to a physical fall, from a higher position to a lower one? Or was it a transformation which could seem like a fall, because indeed sometime was "lost," in order to "gain" something else? Humanity lost its moral and thanatic ignorance or innocence and acquired awareness of morality and mortality: the loss of innocence can certainly be seen as a "Fall," but the acquisition of a higher level of consciousness opens the door to the attainment of a higher-level purpose, that of knowing God and of freely becoming united with him in love. This is turning the notion of "Fall" on its head: in metaphysical terms, the "Fall" was an ascent to a higher level of existence, the acquisition of the knowledge of life and death, of good and evil, and the capacity (free will) essential for humanity to acquire the divine resemblance and deification, defined in patristic theology as the goal of human existence.

4. Or the Initial Condition of Humanity?

Paradise, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the existence of prior state of perfection, the Fall and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise are not essential Christian dogmas and were not

the subject of dogmatic pronouncements in ancient times; they do not figure in the Nicene Creed nor in dogmatic pronouncements of other Ecumenical Councils, in spite of considerable patristic attention to these themes. In this perspective, a relativization of the historicity of the “Fall” does not affect key Christian dogmas.

Discarding the Fall as “history” affects aspects of traditional patristic anthropology, without undermining it completely. Patristic anthropology reposes on four major pillars: God created humanity in his “image and likeness”; humans are multipartite beings, composed of a material body and an immaterial soul (some Fathers, like Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, identify three basic elements, body, soul and spirit); humans are inclined toward evil and sin; and humans are at the same time called to enter into full communion or union with God (*theosis*), partially in this life and in all plenitude in the life to come. None of these essential elements of patristic anthropology is threatened by a vision of the Paradise and Fall in Genesis 2–3 as myth or symbol, rather than actual history.

What is undermined is the traditional explanation of the origins of sin and evil and more specifically of the sinful inclination of humanity, which are generally ascribed, in both patristic and much modern theology, to the Fall of Adam and Eve and the subsequent transmission of the effects the Fall, primarily death and an inclination toward evil, to their descendents, that is, to all of humanity. If there was no Fall of hypothetical first parents, the notion of “original sin” with universal or cosmic consequences itself falls. The theological implications of the loss of the idea of original sin, or as John Romanides calls it, the “ancestral sin,” will vary considerably among Christian denominations. For Western theology in the Augustinian tradition, the consequences of the loss of the notion of original sin are certainly major, while for Eastern Christians, the implications are much less, since Eastern theology has generally considered the “original sin” of Adam and Eve to be a personal sin whose guilt is not transmitted to the descendents of the first parents.⁶³ Traditional

63 It is for this reason that Western theology could have more difficulty than Orthodox theology in freeing itself from a historical Fall because of the close relationship

Eastern Christian anthropology focuses more on the transmission of the consequences of the “ancestral sin” to the descendents of the first parents.

If the idea of a Fall and hence of original sin is abandoned, we are left with the question of accounting for the existence of decay, death, and evil in the world. As we have suggested, unless we are prepared to turn to artificial meta-historical, meta-scientific, or pseudo-scientific constructs, it is inescapable to accept that decay and death have been aspects of creation from the outset, from the first divine “Fiat!,” and are not a cosmic consequence of human disobedience. While theories such as those of Bulgakov, Bena, and de Beer may have a certain theological attractiveness, they are nonetheless unsatisfactory because they imply major discontinuities and inconsistencies between the scientific and the religious accounts of the world and the appearance of humans. Nonetheless one important element can be retained from such theories, the origin of the human spirit, the principal aspect of the divine “image and likeness,” as a result of direct divine action rather than solely from biological evolution.

The origin of evil is another matter. We have already suggested some lines of reflection in this respect, but we are still left with the troubling reflection or question: Did God create an imperfect world, not only subject to change, decay and death, but also a weak humanity inclined to evil? In response, we suggest that the application of the categories of “perfect” and “imperfect” to God’s actions in creating the world are retrospective moral human judgments inappropriate to divine actions: it is not for humans to “judge” divine Providence, but to recognize and to praise God for his goodness. In this perspective, creation, including humans, from the outset was neither “perfect” nor “imperfect,” but rather *perfectible* in the fullness of time, according to divine Providence.⁶⁴ The notion of the perfectibility of humans and

of the Fall with the doctrine of original sin as elaborated by Saint Augustine: “The doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of the Fall are inextricably linked in historic Christianity” (i.e., Western Christianity). T. A. Noble, “Original Sin and the Fall: Definitions and a Proposal,” in R. J. Berry & T. A. Noble, eds., *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges* (Leicester: Apollon, 2009), 99–129.

64 Sergius Bulgakov considers that imperfection is inherent in the nature of created

of creation as a whole is suggested in Genesis by God's instruction that Adam should "till and keep the garden" and should name the animals (Gen 2:15; 19); these instructions imply the notion of change and hence of striving toward completion or perfectibility, when God will be "all in all." It is therefore more proper to speak of the incomplete initial condition of humanity than of a state of perfection from which the first parents "fell."

Sin and evil are the consequences of the greatest gift that God gave to humans, free will, precisely the capacity to choose between good (which leads toward God and hence toward life) and evil (which leads away from God and toward death). This is the theological meaning of the Genesis allegory of Paradise: Adam and Eve, all of us, are given the freedom to choose, to say "yes" or "no" to God. Each human has this same freedom. God took an awesome "risk" in granting humans freedom, while at the same time assuming the consequences of this risk, as Christ's Incarnation, life, passion, death, and Resurrection amply demonstrate. God is not absolute king or dictator determining the past, the present and the future: God shares or grants part of his freedom to his free creatures: we share this divine quality with God. In this sense God is "resting"; he does not determine everything. In granting humans free will, God has given humans an awesome responsibility.

In much traditional theology, the Incarnation of the Word of God is linked with the Fall of humanity: the Second Person of the Holy Trinity becomes/assumes human nature to save humanity from the effects of the first transgression and its consequences. Does the abandonment of the Fall infirm in any way the Incarnation? No! The patristic adage, from Irenaeus onward, that "God became man in order that man might become god," remains intact. To achieve perfection is to achieve union with God: God did not give humans the capacity to achieve this end by their own innate powers, but

being and hence that creatures strive for perfection. "If some say that the imperfection of creation is attributable to the Creator, and he is therefore responsible for this imperfection, to this we must answer that the path of imperfection leads to the state of perfection in which God will be all in all." *The Bride of the Lamb*, 149.

only in cooperation (synergy) with God himself. The Incarnation was necessary to open the way for humanity to achieve union with God: Jesus said "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6); there is no other way.

Abandonment of the Fall does, however, infirm one line of reflection on the Incarnation: that the purpose of the Incarnation was to redeem "fallen humanity" from its initial transgression of divine ordinance and to restore it to its initial perfect state of union with God in Paradise. The Incarnation is not oriented toward "restoration" of a lost state of moral innocence, but rather to eschatology, to the full achievement of the Kingdom of God, the purpose of all creation: union with God.

In spite of the important references to Adam in the Pauline epistles, the New Testament permits a certain relativization of Adam and Eve and the Fall. Adam is mentioned only once in the Gospels, in Luke's genealogy of Christ, and there are no references to the Fall nor to Eve or Eden—indeed, Jesus refers to the Fall of Satan (Lk 10:18), but not to the Fall of humanity.

While theologians still struggle with the implications of evolution for religion, it is likely that the majority of Christians have learned to live with both evolution and their faith, accepting a certain degree of tension and ambiguity, even outright contradiction, without undermining a profound if unexpressed conviction that somehow in God science and theology are reconciled in the one divine Truth of the Holy Trinity: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life."

In this light one can only admire the faith of the simple Russian worker, who, in 1937, at the end of a presentation by the League of Militant Atheists on cosmology intended to undermine belief in God, was heard to exclaim: "How wonderfully God has ordered the universe!"⁶⁵

65 *Izvestia*, April 27, 1937, cited in Pierre Pascal, *The Religion of the Russian People* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1976), 113.