

Creation in Light of Scriptural Revelation. Man's Responsibility for the World.

**PhD Dissertation in Biblical Theology written by Fr. Gheorghe Teodor Petrutiu under
the direction of Fr. Univ. Prof. Dr. Vasile Mihoc**

Through an intense analysis, the author manages to present in approximately 300 pages a very powerful and very complex subject, which was researched very little in the Romanian theology and spirituality. He is managing to develop the research and the investigation of the specific theme with valuable considerations specific to the Orthodox theology and spirituality. The author created therefore a very interesting combination of patristic, spiritual and dogmatic thought on this very interesting theme, combination encompassed in the Eastern Tradition of the Fathers, who had a very clear vision of the universe created by God.

The thesis is structured in six parts, following an analytical and synthetic view at the same time. The author is presenting in the first part an **Introduction**, in the second part **The Main Sources of Biblical Revelation regarding Creation and the intent of their content**, in the third part **The Creation of the invisible world according to the Biblical Revelation**, in the fourth part **The Creation and the Organizing of the Visible world as the Universe**, and in the fifth part **Man's Creation in Biblical Theology**. The sixth chapter discusses **The Divine Creation and Cosmic Deontology**

In the Introduction, the author is making an incursion in the creation theology's approaches in the Romanian theology but also in the international one, exploring the stage of their theological scientific accomplishments, presenting the principal tendencies and orientations regarding the creation theology as it is described by the biblical, but also by the patristic and scientific traditions. There are presented the principal collective works and books published in the Romanian and international theology, dealing with the great problems of the theology of creation.

The author begins the analysis of his thesis' theme in the second chapter, by presenting an inventory and an evaluation of the main sources in the books of the Bible that mention the creation, texts that are fundamental for the various theories and doctrines that

comprise the theology of creation. He also outlines the general intentionality of the content of these sources, by making a short and concise philological analysis of certain key terms that are specific to the theology of creation. The presentation and inventory of these biblical texts itself represents a very meticulous initiative, the author managing to provide a general view over the theology of creation in the Bible and over the importance of creation as a theological theme rooted in the text of the Scripture.

This short presentation of the main texts of the Scripture referring to creation represents only a frame for the theology of creation. Besides these main texts that have a major importance for the theology of creation there are other small scriptural references that affirm the role of absolute creator of the God of the Judeo-Christian revelation, with multiple and crucial consequences, both theoretical and epistemological for the theology of creation in particular, but also for theology and culture in general.

Through a very generous amount of biblical and patristic texts, the author is structuring his discourse over the two biblical narrations about creation that we find in the first pages of the book of Genesis (Genesis 1:1-2,4a-text attributed to the sacerdotal tradition; Genesis 2:4b-3:24-text attributed to the Yahvist tradition), pointing with a lot of clarity the characteristic aspects of each editing tradition, as well as the differences of vision between the two versions. Thus, the author is managing to present a literary analysis of the key terms from the first narration in Genesis (1:1-2:4a), describing the majestic spectacle of the sequential order of creation, introducing first on the stage the cosmic domain of the lifeless, then the life and ultimately the conscience, then gradually restraining the horizon from the totality of the seen and unseen universe to the terrestrial realm and to man's adventure on earth. At the same time, the second narration in Genesis (2:4b-3:34) gives "chronological" priority to man over the living world, pointing out that the world's destiny depends on man's will and freedom.

In defining his work's methods for the clarification of the proposed theme, the author feels compelled to meticulously analyze the other texts from the Scripture that refer to the theology of creation as well, bringing to center stage the elements from the text that offer a larger understanding of the phenomenon of creation in the Holy Scripture.

Thus, the author is making an analysis of the theology of creation that comes from the book of the Psalms, with an emphasis on Psalm 103. Many Psalms contain texts referring to creation and to death, and Psalm 103 is a perfect example of a combination of these two

realities. In this context, the author examines the structure of the text, followed by an analysis of the style, construction and of the various themes present in the Psalm 103, as well as a study of the translation of the text. This analysis of Psalm 103 will represent the background for a thematic discussion, which will precede the ending of the chapter with some series of conclusions. This psalm includes theological ideas and pertinent literary themes that come from various theological traditions of the Hebrew Bible that intersected along the way. The conclusion is that the theology of creation in Psalm 103 represents an attempt of reshaping and reimagining of the world, in particular after the catastrophic event of the Babylonian exile from 587-586 B. C.

In the second part of this second chapter, the author mentions the texts referring to creation from the book of Job, Ecclesiastes and the book of Isaiah, showing the way in which the theology of creation that we find in these books was influenced by the difficult part of the history of the Hebrew nation. This theory elaborated and debated by famous scholars from the west, shows that the polemic discourses found in Job offer an image of the intellectual and theological activity in Israel after the rebuilding of the second temple. This is obvious from the various viewpoints in the answers regarding creation, death, God, and the relationship between God and creation. In the book of Isaiah, the author is centering on the creation of Israel as a nation, connecting creation with Exodus and the redeeming of Israel, culminating with the focus on the future recreation of Jerusalem and its people, as a response to the pre-exile failure of Israel.

Therefore, the author shows that there is a sequential development of the theology of creation in the books of the Old Testament, development which follows a natural progression from the expression of God's sovereignty over creation to the depiction of the eschatological recreation of the world, progression which fits very well with the historical and social evolution of the Jewish nation.

In the third part of the thesis, the author makes an analysis of the creation and establishing of the invisible world, according to the biblical revelation. This chapter also contains a presentation of the existing controversy between the scholars, some insisting that the God of Israel is just another representation of the god "El" from the Canaanite mythology and the others that oppose this theory with strong arguments. The latter prove that the linguistic and cultural similarities between certain biblical passages and some myths of Ugaritic origin were highly exaggerated and unilaterally interpreted. The same scholars also

show that, on the contrary, the Ugaritic archeological discoveries point on the contrast between the corrupted cult of Baal and the proper worship of Yahweh. Alexander Heidel shows that “The Old Testament was addressed to all nations and it is only natural that the authors of the Bible used writing styles and images that were familiar and easy to understand to Israel’s neighbors as well.”

In the same third chapter, the author undertakes in a profound scriptural, dogmatic and patristic way, the topic of angels and their role in the plan of the divine creation. Quoting Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, the author maintains that we often forget that angelology and demonology are completely subordinate to Christology, according to St. Apostle Paul. It must be reiterated that the angels are a reality that is distinct from God and from man. They are essentially marginal characters, inseparably attached to fulfilling God’s will in time and space. Angelology does not have an autonomous, independent, absolute sense, detached from the rest of the salvific revelation. The angels are not the subject of an exclusively dedicated reflection. They are at the boundary of communication between God and man, their service being necessary for salvation. The angels were not created for their own happiness but in ontological connection with the world and with the people, to whom they have the duty to reveal the understanding of God through the sensible elements of the world over which they are masters. Thus, their duty is to lift the man and the created world into the eon, into the time which is overcome by eternity.

In the fourth chapter, the author continues and develops the ideas presented in the previous chapters, offering a rigorous analysis of the terms that refer to the creation of the material world and its ordering as cosmos. In the first part of this chapter, the author presents the mythical Semitic-Babylonian conceptual context of the biblical teaching about creation, affirming the fact that the theory which places the biblical thought environment in Babylon lacks scientific veracity. The most serious objection against this theory was formulated by W. Wundt, who points out the fact that the fundamental thought environment of the people from the Middle East is completely different from the visual orientation of the Greeks. The first was static but the second was dynamic, therefore we cannot talk about a duplication of the creation of heavenly or earthly world for the Eastern nations, at least not as a predominant principle. These nations were mainly focused on the theories about conflicts and events from the beginning and the end of times, about which the priests and the prophets were singing or preaching, or they were reenacting them in conventional rituals.

At the same time, the author affirms that we cannot deny the existence of certain coincidences of ideas between the Babylonian and the Hebrew concepts about the creation of the world, such as: the rising of the earth from the waters; the separation of the earth from the sky; the creation of the world and its purpose. But in spite of these literary similarities we have to point out the fundamental differences which gives the biblical text on creation a distinct character not only in comparison with *Enuma Elish*, but with all of the big myths about creation from the Egyptian and Babylonian circle of thought.

The author completes this large and complex journey in the spiritual phenomenology of the antique nations and using frequently the established opinions and theories of contemporary scholars and researchers he manages to offer a condensed synthesis of their studies on the topic at hand.

In this approach, the author proves clearly that, from a theological point of view, the story of creation from the book of Genesis sets itself apart in many ways from the other stories of creation existing in antiquity, even while using similar literary constructs. So we can affirm with certainty that the biblical narrative of creation does not reflect the Babylonian view on the world, but rather it surpasses it. There are indeed many aspects in the narrative where an anti-mythic and a polemic perspective can be plausibly supported. Nevertheless, all throughout this process, the many aspects of the continuity of the vision over the world should not be ignored nor overlooked.

In the same chapter, the author offers an analysis of the elements of this vision over the world (the beginning from chaos; order out of chaos; Theogony-Cosmogony; Theomachy; the role and the status of the gods; function and structure; the cosmos as a temple; the role and the status of man; the depiction of the structural cosmos). This analysis will prove that, even if we take into consideration a certain degree of polemic, the Hebrews were still thinking about creation in terms much more similar to those of antique world, than those of our post-illuminist perspective. Their distancing from the traditional antique vision on the world was theological, not cosmological.

The author insists on the vocabulary that was used and its affecting tones, on the order of the words in a certain text, on the cultural-historic context in which it was written, etc. In this direction, we find here a very rich semantic analysis of the words in the creation stories which have a high degree of ambiguity. Thus, the author reveals how that the narration of creation from Genesis 1:1-2:4a begins with probably the most discussed verse from the entire

Hebrew Bible. The only aspect that needs to be remembered is the precise nuance of the word *'eres* (earth). Sometimes it means simply (1) the earth on which we stand. For others, (2) it refers to what exists under the earth, meaning a realm of darkness and death. And sometimes it has an (3) ambiguous meaning, that gathers nuances from both of the above.

The analysis of this term in comparison with other texts in the Scripture, shows the initial stages in the manifestation of divinity, stages which are to be connected with the verses 2 and 3 from the first chapter of Genesis. Thus, it can be asserted that the primordial darkness and chaos in Genesis 1:2, represents the incipient phase of an unusually expressed theophany. In the accomplishment of it, three stages are described: first is the improbable condition of a primordial chaos in need of divine intervention; secondly, there is the incipient environment for revelation: darkness; and thirdly there is the Spirit of God that hovers above the not yet ordered waters.

Then, the author analyzes and evaluates the initial state of the earth, described in Genesis 1:2 as *tōhū wābōhū*. This expression is translated usually as *without form, and void*. Along the way though, most translators felt that the meaning of the expression „without form and void” is not satisfactory for the context in Genesis 1:2. Various translations of this expression as „lack of form”, „lack of reality”, „emptiness”, or „nothingness” were suggested as a context. Consequently, it was proposed that, according to all analogies, the word *tōhū* should be translated as *chaos*. Therefore, the expression *tōhū wābōhū* from v. 2 should be considered as meaning the primordial „chaos”, which does not simply means an „empty space”, but rather „disorder” or „disorganization” and finds itself in direct opposition with „creation”.

According to the analysis of several western scholars, the author comes to the conclusion that the expression *tōhū wābōhū* from Genesis 1:2 describes merely earth, which is an empty, undefined, chaotic place, meaning “an unproductive and uninhabited place”. Therefore, the main reason the biblical narrative mentions the earth as *tōhū wābōhū* in this setting is to inform the public that the earth is not “yet” as they know it. In other words, communicating to human beings the narrative of creation is impossible without avoiding the usage of language and literary forms known by them. That is why, in order to offer general information, the author of the biblical text uses in this verse an experimental language, in order to explain the initial situation of the earth, that was not “yet” the earth the people got to know after the creation process was finalized.

The last part of this chapter offers the opportunity for the author to insist on the Christological characteristic of creation, which reveals the greatness, the power and the wisdom of God (Romans 1:19-20; Psalm 19:1; Acts 17:24-25)

The creation of the world is the work of the Holy Trinity, in which the Father creates from nothing, through the Son, images and forms of his Wisdom, which he imprints on the matter through the Holy Spirit.

As a manifestation towards the world of the Trinitarian dialogue, the revelation begins with God's decision to create the world (John 1:1), the plan of creation being first conceived in Father's mind, before the physical existence of the universe. World's creation from nothing by the Logos/Word of God and through God's Wisdom - therefore through the Son and in the Spirit (Psalm 32:6) - coincides with the imprinting in the universe of a rational and spiritual infrastructure, followed by the materialization of this plan, and further with the revealing of the divine intention regarding its purpose. Therefore, the universe was not just brought into existence, but also permeated with information, rationale and beauty, all to be able to celebrate "the Son's mystery" inscribed in all beings. Because all were created through the Logos (John 1:3, 10; Colossians 1:15-18), all creating acts are acts of revelation as well: God creates by saying and he says by creating.

In the fifth chapter, the author makes a scriptural and patristic synthesis in which he describes the creation of man in the biblical theology. Man has a special position in the entire universe, position reflected in the special way in which he was created. God created man with his own hands, as the psalmist says: "Your hands have made me and fashioned me..." (Psalm 118:73). In the interpretation of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, these hands are the Son and the Holy Spirit, as accomplishing Subjects of Father's plan of salvation.

The creation of man is special also because it was accomplished after a "council of the Holy Trinity", which displays God's intention to create a loving person, fashioned after the model of the Trinitarian Person. The word אָדָם / *ha-adam* in Hebrew is a collective singular, does not have a form of plural, so we could translate it by "humanity", "the men", not just "the man". In Genesis 1 the humanity is perceived as a great family whose parent is Adam, the first man, the first human being. The Hebrew interpreters and translators render the noun *adam* as "man", whether or not it has an article. In the Masoretic text, showing the vision of the rabbinic exegesis, the word *adam* becomes a name only from Genesis 4:25. In contrast, in the Greek text of the Septuagint and in the Latin text of the Vulgate, *Ἀδάμ* / *Adam*

as a name appears for the first time in Genesis 2:16. The creation of the first man represents therefore the creation of the human nature. This means that both man and woman are bearers of God's image with the same creative gifts and the same responsibility.

In this same chapter, the author insists on the theology of the divine image in man, referring to multiple patristic texts that shed light on this aspect. The interpretations that the Holy Fathers give to *the image of God* in man complete each other, none of them intending to exclusively limit themselves just to one or the other of the parts or aspects, as the scholastics will do later.

That is why any desire to systematize the Holy Fathers' theology of the *image* risks to reduce the mystery of man to a simple philosophical concept or a simple entity with a sense and a meaning foreign to the patristic spirit, which points out that man in its entirety, body and soul, is *image of God*.

Thus, the coordinates of the image cannot be exhausted in definitions, as the Church Fathers enumerated just some of them. The content of the image of God in man represents a complexity of qualities according to the image of "God's attributes", communicated and poured in the created nature of man through the uncreated divine energies. The Holy Fathers put great emphasis on the man's free will, meaning man's capacity to self-determination, which is the fundamental characteristic that differentiates him from everything else that is not a personal subject. The imprinting through grace of the "attributes of God" in the created nature represents the hallmarking of man as the image of God.

The last part of the thesis is undertaking a subject very intensely debated in the western theological circles, but insufficiently studied and analyzed in the Romanian Orthodox theology. It is the theory of man's responsibility for the creation, of man's place in the universe created by God, of the paradisiac harmony between man and nature and especially of the potential of recreation of a perfect harmony between humanity and creation on the basis of the Redeeming Sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All these have as a purpose to point out the severe break that happened in the connection between man and universe, between man and the world, through the exploitation without conscience of the world's resources and through the irresponsible way in which the man looks at the problem of pollution of the environment in which God placed him to live.

By distancing himself from nature, man distances himself from God. By not respecting the nature, man betrays the covenant, going against the commandment that God gave him. If the original sin brought with it the distancing from the nature, the breaking of harmony between the nature and man, we can say without doubt that the lack of care for the creation and its abusive exploitation, implies without any doubt, sinful behavior.

When we talk about the protection of nature, when we as Christians refer to the environment and to the responsibility of protecting it, the instance that we should be appealing to is our conscience, placed in us by God. In other words, it is not the world that should primarily be warning us about the need to respect the nature, but God, because God was the one who first commanded man to guard the gift entrusted to him.

As a conscious being that was vested and ordained by God to care for His creation, man's every action has to consider this perspective of display in the world through him of a divine plan and project of edification and manifestation of creation. This is how the theology of creation is placing the foundation of a universal deontology of man towards creation, which affirms and obeys primarily the ontological, moral and social laws revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures but especially in the creation itself.

Although just a study of biblical theology, the present thesis presents itself as an attempt to offer a general view and an introduction on the strictly biblical perspective but also on the way it was interpreted in the ecclesial and patristic tradition in Christianity in general and in Orthodoxy in particular. But the information that was gathered and interpreted can also serve as source and foundation for answers and for dialogues with other sciences in connection with creation, cosmology and anthropology in general. When trying to give complete and correct answers, the tradition of biblical revelation offers a completely distinct and original perspective, which cannot be ignored.

Through the presentation of the many and complex theories and aspects of biblical creation, cosmology and anthropology, the thesis confirms an inner harmony between the various parts of the created world and its Creator. This fact is very important in the context of the contemporary individualistic concepts and tendencies regarding the possibility of materialistic exploration and exploitation of macro cosmos by man, who in his desire of mine, excavate, and civilize at an interplanetary and even galactic scale, he puts himself – as he did all throughout history - in the position of a demolisher of the Temple of God.

The perspective of the biblical theology of creation, as narrow as we might judge it to be, defines and places man as king and priest over the created earth, but not over the lights on the firmament, nor the galaxies or the entire universe. That is why, the clear understanding of the revealed information that the author attempted to comprehend here, could help man avoid the wondering in extroverted adventures and push him to discover the inner mystical way towards his own ontological and spiritual evolution, which would truly reveal him as the son of divine glory after whom all the creation longs and sighs.

Conclusion: The thesis in its entirety has a distinct importance because it analyzes with scientific competence the most important texts pertaining to the theology of creation in the Holy Scriptures. The exploration of this theme, which was very timidly studied so far in the Romanian theology, manages to clarify many of the subtle aspects that our theology did not weigh so profoundly until now.