

LESSON 03: CREATION AND THE FALL

Synopsis: The one, true God is distinguished from all else that exists by the fact He alone created all things from nothing (*ex nihilo*). As sole and unique Creator, only He should be worshipped. Before creating the material world, God created the immaterial – or “noetic” – world, the world of thought (intelligibility, *logoi*) and of the angels. All that He created is good, and the culmination of His creation is Mankind, made in His own “image,” and uniting the immaterial and material realms. Evil came into the world through an act of self-love, the “fall,” by the prompting of the devil from envy. The fall fragmented human existence, causing division between man and God, between male and female, between man and creation, and even within the human being, between mind and heart, and ultimately, between body and soul in death. Through the sinful egotism of the fall, man was separated from God and became subject to corruption and death, both spiritual and physical.

[I] Biblical Monotheism

The first principle of all Biblical theology:

- God alone always existed (Ps 89:2 LXX)
- He created all things: “the heaven, the earth, the sea and all that is therein” (Ps 145: 5-7 LXX)
- “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...” (Creed)
- Therefore, He alone should be worshipped (Is 42:5-8; Ps 94:1-6 LXX).

[II] The Meaning of “ex nihilo” (“out of nothing”)

- Holding that God created all things from nothing is unique to the Biblical faith.
- God had no helper – creation is uniquely His work (Is 44:24)
 - He needed nothing aside from Himself to create: omnipotence.
- He created “ex nihilo” (“out of nothing”) (Heb 11:3; 2 Mac 7:28; Rom 4:17).
 - No pre-existing matter limited His freedom in creating.
- Therefore, creation is an expression of His will alone.

[III] The Content and Goodness of Creation

- God created heaven and earth (Gen 1)
 - “Heaven” understood to be the noetic (spiritual, intelligible) and angelic realm (Col. 1:16)
 - The intelligible world is also created – only God is eternal and uncreated.
 - This distinguishes Christian cosmology from Platonism
- All creation is good (no dualism)
- Created by God, for Man
 - Paradise/Eden is structured, a “garden” (harmony and communion)
 - The world was meant to be a medium of dialogue, intellectual growth and communion

[IV] Humanity: The Pinnacle of Creation (Ps 8:4-5)

- Man as the “Image” (*ikon*) of God (Gen 1:26-7)
 - Created in the image of the Son/Logos (Rom 8:29)
 - Reason, free will, dominion over creation
 - Created in the image of the Holy Trinity (Genesis 1:27)
 - Personal, capability of pure love, communion
 - Created male and female
 - Created in grace-filled communion with God
 - Innocent (naked, like a child), but not perfected (requires our will)
- Image and Likeness
 - Image: An indelible part of nature
 - Likeness: Our capacity for unending growth in God (theosis)
- Body and soul
 - United immaterial and material creation
- Man as priest, prophet and steward/royal of creation

[V] The Fall of Man

Two Trees: Tree of Life, Tree of Knowledge

- God’s Commandment: Keep a fast
 - Meant to occasion spiritual growth
 - To learn good and evil by doing good
 - If you eat, you will die (not, “I will kill you”)
- The temptation of the serpent
 - The lie: Become god without God
 - The truth: Alienation from God is death.
- The essence of the sin: self-love, egotism
 - Man places his goals above his love for God
 - Misuses nature, and his own nature

The Effects of the Fall

- Breaking of relationship (Shame, nakedness, hiding from God)
 - between man and God, man and woman, man and creation, man and the angelic realm, between body and soul, mind and heart
- Squandered opportunity for repentance (each blames the other)
- Physical: subject to corruption (pain, disease, physical death)
- Spiritual: subject to moral confusion, weakness of will, emotional imbalance, inward alienation
- The Expulsion from Paradise
 - God’s act of mercy
 - Death: motivation for repentance
 - God’s promise of a Deliverer

A Note on Original vs. Ancestral Sin

- All of us, as children of Adam and Eve, are born with their fallen nature, subject to corruption, ignorance, concupiscence (an inclination towards egotism and sin), and death.

- This fact is referred to as “ancestral” or “original” sin.
- However, the Orthodox Church does not accept an understanding of original sin that would imply that we additionally inherit the personal culpability (or guilt) of Adam.

Key Points and Practical Applications for our Life in Christ

“Come let us rejoice in the Lord, let us shout with jubilation unto God our Savior. Let us come before His countenance with thanksgiving, and with psalms let us shout in jubilation unto Him. For the Lord is a great God and a great king over all the earth. For in His hand are the ends of the earth, and the heights of the mountains are His. For the sea is His, and He made it; and the dry land His hands have fashioned. O come, let us worship and fall down before Him, and let us weep before the Lord Who made us. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts...” (Ps 94:1-7 LXX)

From the Fathers

“Believe thou first and foremost that there is one God who created and arranged all things and brought them out of non-existence into being” (*Shepherd of Hermas*, II.1).

“From it [the Christian Faith] we know that, because there is Mind behind the universe, it did not originate itself; because God is infinite, not finite, it was not made from pre-existent matter, but out of nothing and out of non-existence absolute and utter God brought it into being through the Word” (St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 3).

Prayer at Holy God (Liturgy of St John Chrysostom): “O Holy God... who out of nothingness hast brought all things into being...”

“With great gladness let us accept the proclamation of the Fast: for if Adam our forefather had fasted, we should not have suffered banishment from Eden. The fruit that brought death upon me was pleasant to the eyes and good for food. Then let us not be taken prisoner by our eyes; let not our tongue delight in costly foods, for once they have been eaten they are worthless. Let us shun all greed: then we shall not become slaves to the passions which follow an excess of food and drink. Let us sign ourselves with the blood of Him who for our sakes willingly was led to death, and the destroying angel will not touch us [cf. connection between blood on door-posts and blood of Christ], and may we eat the Holy Passover of Christ for the salvation of our souls.” (*Lenten Triodion*, Orthros, 1st Friday, p. 272).