

Creation science and the traditional approach to the understanding of the Bible.

Fr. Constantine Bufeev, Nicolas Kolchurinsky

We said, further, that in this same ecclesiastical antiquity two points are very carefully and earnestly to be held in view by those who would keep clear of heresy: first, they should ascertain whether any decision has been given in ancient times as to the matter in question by the whole priesthood of the Catholic Church, with the authority of a General Council: and, secondly, if some new question should arise on which no such decision has been given, they should then have recourse to the opinions of the holy Fathers, of those at least, who, each in his own time and place, remaining in the unity of communion and of the faith, were accepted as approved masters; and whatsoever these may be found to have held, with one mind and with one consent, this ought to be accounted the true and Catholic doctrine of the Church, without any doubt or scruple.

St. Vincent of Lerins. *Commonitorium*,

I.

Scientific researches of creationists are particularly based on the following exegetical assertions: 1/. Biblical days (Gen.1-2) are calendar days. 2/. No more than 10000 years are passed since the beginning of the Creation. 3/. During the Biblical days of Creation of the world God was really and actively implementing it.

1. Let us examine how much justified are these fundamental scriptural postulates which form the basis of the creation paradigm. In the frames of the logical approach (*solo Scriptura*) to the analysis of biblical text, days of the Creation can be understood literally and as those equal to “thousands” years: **one day [is] with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.** (2 Peter.3,8). If we take into account that the word “thousand” in the Bible can denote an indefinitely large number (Revel.20:6; Song of Sol.8:11,12), it is possible to make an assumption about the indefinitely big length of Creation days.

Some famous Protestant exegetics advance the following arguments against this comprehension of the meaning of the word “day” in the first two chapters of the Genesis[1]¹.

1).“The Apostle speaks here (2 Peter.3,8) neither about the book of Genesis, nor about the days of creation” (*transl. from Russian*) [1, P. 41].

Nonetheless, we cannot see that this conclusion follows from the cited text in the second epistle of Peter. Indeed, that the first half of this quote does not directly apply to the Hexaemeron, does not follow from anywhere.

2)“In this context, this verse speaks about the Second Coming of Christ. It says that for God, a day is like a thousand years, because God is beyond time” (*transl. from Russian*) [1, P. 42].

This interpretation is, of course, correct from the Orthodox Christian perspective since we can see a similar view in the Biblical commentaries by Blessed Theophilactus, Bishop of Bulgaria. However, the meaning of this and many other texts in Holy Scripture (e.g. Deuteronomy 25,4 – see below) may be manifold. In this sense, it is not clear why we should limit ourselves to the mentioned contextual interpretation of this fragment.

¹ But for all that the Protestant exegesis of creationist orientation is about 500 years old, we chose for our analysis this issue, because this recent publication has a great popularity and therefore we supposed that it should contain the most weighty and chosen argumentation in the frames of the indicated approach.

Furthermore, it is clear that the comprehension of biblical texts should not always be strictly limited to their immediate situational contexts. An example of such a different exegetical understanding is the interpretation of Deuteronomy 25,4 by The Apostle Paul. **Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?** (I Corinthians, 9,7-9).

3) The verse continues as follows: **“and a thousand years as one day”**. This is, in essence, the crux of the objection to those who try to equate a day of Creation to a thousand years! This passage does not affirm at all that one day is equal to a thousand years or vice versa” (*transl. from Russian*) [1,P.42].

However, the weight of the word “as” here, in the second part of the verse (2 Peter.3,8), may not be the same as in the first half, in which case the hypothesis of “long” days of Creation still stands.

4) In the Book of Psalms we read: “For a thousand years in thy sight [are but] as yesterday when it is past, and [as] a watch in the night” (Psalms.90,4). ... it means that a thousand days are compared not with a single day but, in general, with a short period of time” (*transl. from Russian*) [1, P.42].

Undoubtedly, this can be seen from the context of this passage. However, it is still not clear as to why this way of interpretation (and only it) can be applied to 2 Peter.3,8.

5) “If somebody based on this verse posits that under the word “day” the Bible here really means a thousand years, then they should be consistent and go on further to say e.g. that Jonah spent three thousand years in the belly of a huge fish” (*transl. from Russian*) [1, P. 42].

The approach itself is not correct, since one and the same word in the Bible can signify different things. E.g.: **Judge not, that ye be not judged** (μη κρινετε ινα μη κριθητε)(Math.7,1). **Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment** (μη κρινετε κατ οψιν αλλα την δικαιαν κρισιν κρινετε). (John 7,24). Therefore we cannot say that the same word used in different Biblical texts should necessarily mean the same thing.

The arguments, based only on the logical analysis of the biblical text, put forth against the second interpretation [1] of 2 Peter.3,8, do not seem to us to be sufficiently persuasive.

The theory of “days-eras” collides however with big and heavily solvable problems[1, P. 46–48]. One can conclude from this, that logical analysis of biblical text allows to make a conclusion about the meaning of the word “day”, used in the biblical narrations about the Creation, as calendar day, yet only on the level of a *highly plausible hypothesis*, and does not allow to make the conclusion at the level of the *doubtless truth*.

2. The assertion - the interval of time, passed since the days of Creation, is not longer than 10000 years, is established (in the frames of the logical approach) on the biblical genealogy and indications in the Bible of the corresponding dates of lives [2]. These calculations are to considerable extent hypothetical, because “the word “generate” may assume misses of generations” [1 – P.36]². This in turn compels to consider the results of such computations [2,3] as only hypothetical and prevents from making definite conclusions about dating of many biblical events, particularly of the six days of Creation.

3. The meaning of the word *created* (עשה), frequently used in the text of Gen.1-2 for the description of the events in Six Days of Creation causes generally no doubts for representatives of creationist science. However, it is necessary to notice that this treatment, as we will try to demonstrate it below, in the frames of the *Solo Scriptura* approach has also a character of exegetical *hypothesis*.

² Some excellent examples of how the words “begat” and “the son of” used in the Bible, can allow gaps of various lengths in actual genealogies are presented in the [2, P.481].

In the texts of the Bible, when it is spoken about God's actions, three variants can be meant. These are: *direct actions of God* (e.g. Acts 2,32), situations in which *God permits* some events (e.g. Gen.45,7-8), giving sanction to natural processes as well as to free being's actions. Sometimes the God's actions are understood as complex combinations of the first and the second ones (e.g. Gen.45,8).

Let us look at the following examples:

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses (Acts 2,32). (The direct action of God).

And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now [it was] not you [that] sent me hither, but God. (Gen. 45,7-8). These are the words of St. Joseph, said to his brothers. (God's permission).

The example of the third case: **And he (God) hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt** (Gen. 45,7-8).

In order to determine which variant we deal with in the particular case, sometimes the context is sufficient - situational or general theological, contained in other parts of the Bible. But in other cases such context is absent. Thus, everywhere we meet in the text of the Bible the words about God's actions, we every time come across with the possibility of triple interpretation and inadequate treatments should be rejected in every case for the precise comprehension.

In particular this is applicable to the word *created* (עָשָׂה). At least in one place of the Bible this verb is used in the sense of God's permission, but not of His active action. **Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done (עָשָׂה) [it]?** (Amos. 3:6). The literal interpretation of עָשָׂה here is evidently inadmissible (Deuter.32,4; Matthew 5,48 and many other places in the Bible).

The question is how to understand the meaning of this word עָשָׂה in the Genesis, Ch. 1-2. Has God created by Himself or merely permitted the events?

The context of the first two chapters of Genesis does not allow to say unambiguously in which meaning this word is used here. At the first glance, the words of others books of the Bible tell in favor of just active creative work of God, described in first two chapters of Genesis and expressed by עָשָׂה. E.g. : **I have made(עָשָׂה) the earth, the man and the beast that [are] upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me** (Gerem.27,5). Similar places –Isa.44,24; Isa.45,12; Gerem.10,12; Gerem.32,17; Gerem.51,15.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, every God's permission implies that He actively holds all things in being and therefore is named as יְיָ (Amos. 5,16). In Acts 17,25 we can read: **Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.** Therefore one cannot exclude that the indication towards the creation by the God's force, points out however to the situations, when He has only permitted the events.

Thus according to the logical approach, active creation of God in the first days of Creation seems only as a *highly credible hypothesis*. At the same time another alternative hypothesis remains not refuted with a sufficient rigour. If the comprehension of the word עָשָׂה in the specified places of the Bible narrating about Creation, remains possible in terms of God's permission, than *there remains the possibility for the macro-evolutional processes which could take place during long "days – epochs"* (see items 1-2).

Three foregoing examples were presented in order to illustrate the fact that logical approach to the analysis of the Bible is not enough and can not provide completely reliable biblical foundation for the creation science.

The three mentioned points are however strongly supported by numerous scientific facts. The data suggesting a comparatively young age of the Earth, the existence of irreducibly complex biological systems, etc. present scientific evidence in favor of exegetical hypotheses mentioned above. However, this evidence is indirect. It can only increase the probability of those hypotheses being true. In fact, no finite set of scientific facts which can be interpreted in support of a hypothesis are enough to serve as undoubted proof of it, especially as far as God's Word is concerned.

II

The approach, traditionally existing in the Church, is the interpretation of Scripture in the framework, which are made by Church's St.Tradition - doctrines, presented particularly in resolutions of Oecumenical Councils and in consensus judgements of St.Fathers - Saints, glorified by Oecumenical Church.

The first and the second variants of implementation of this approach besides their rooting in the St. Tradition, have their biblical foundations. Let us consider them briefly.

1) Our Lord Jesus Christ said about his disciples - Apostles: **He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me** (Luc.10:16). Apostles, having in view these words, in their decision made at their Council have told the following: **For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things** (Acts 15:28).

Since the Apostles delivered their authorizations to the bishops³, this statement of Jesus Christ can be attributed to all or to the majority of bishops, acting at the given moment. "(Jesus Christ) says to the apostles, and thereby to all chief rulers, who by vicarious ordination succeed to the apostles: "He that hears you, hears me; and he that hears me, hears Him that sent me; and he that despises you, despises me, and Him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). For from this have arisen, and still arise, schisms and heresies, in that the bishop who is one and rules over the Church is contemned by the haughty presumption of some persons; and the man who is honoured by God's condescension, is judged unworthy by men" – said **St.Cyprian of Carthage** in the III century A.D. [5].

The authority of Oecumenical Councils, which were the meetings of such a kind, is based on this principle

2). Consensus judgements of St.Fathers - Saints, glorified by Oecumenical Church (by the majority of bishops from the Earth - i.e. by an Oecumenical Council, real or virtual), was from

³ "St.John Damascene in the fourth letter to the Africans says that the Oecumenical Church was in general entrusted to bishops; and that as successors to the Holy Apostle Peter are recognized: in Rome - Clement The First Bishop, in Antioch - Euodius; in Alexandria – Mark; that the Holy Apostle Andrew entrusted the see of Constantinople to Stachys; that our Lord made Jacob the bishop of the Holy City of Jerusalem; that after him there was another bishop, and after him there was still another, and so even until our time. That is why Tertullianus in his letter to Papianus names all the bishops as successors to the Apostles. In addition, Eusebius Pamphilus and many fathers, whom it is unnecessary to enumerate, as well as the common and ancient tradition of the Oecumenical Church itself witnessed to the apostolic succession, rank and power of bishops." (*transl. from Russian* [4– ch.10 , P.160.]).

ancient times considered as a sufficient foundation for any opinion. The holy fathers of the ancient Church witness to it.

St. Vincent of Lerins (V century A.D.). “We said, further, that in this same ecclesiastical antiquity two points are very carefully and earnestly to be held in view by those who would keep clear of heresy: first, they should ascertain whether any decision has been given in ancient times as to the matter in question by the whole priesthood of the Catholic Church, with the authority of a General Council: and, secondly, if some new question should arise on which no such decision has been given, they should then have recourse to the opinions of the holy Fathers, of those at least, who, each in his own time and place, remaining in the unity of communion and of the faith, were accepted as approved masters; and whatsoever these may be found to have held, with one mind and with one consent, this ought to be accounted the true and Catholic doctrine of the Church, without any doubt or scruple”[6].

St. Basil the Great (IV century A.D.). “He, who has Christ's Judgement before himself and knows how dangerous it is to take anything away from the words entrusted to us by the Spirit or to add anything to them (Revel.22,18-19), must not attempt to introduce novelties by himself, but must be satisfied with what has been taught by the saints.” (*transl. from Russian*) [7, Book II, On the Son, P.71].

St. Athanasius the Great (IV century A.D.) appealed to heretical followers of Arius: ‘See, we are proving that this view has been transmitted from father to father; but ye, O modern Jews and disciples of Caiaphas, how many fathers can ye assign to your phrases?’[8].

We also have a sufficient and definite biblical foundation for such attitude towards the words of God's Saints. This is Prov.9, 10 and Prov.22, 28. **The commencement of wisdom [is] the fear of Jehovah, And a knowledge of the Holy Ones [is] understanding** (Prov.9, 10) [Young's Literal Translation]. **Remove not a border of olden times, That thy fathers have made.** (Prov.22, 28) [Young's Literal Translation].

The perusal and interpretation of St. Fathers' texts should be made only by means of linguistic standards or special terminology, used in their statements. It is easy to see that without this, the words of the Holy Fathers may be wrongly interpreted, which in turn may lead to a departure from Orthodox Tradition as we know it today. If we cannot understand the intended meaning in the patristic texts, then we invariably will need to recourse to some *supplementary source* of information outside of patristic tradition. This will go contrary to the doctrine of the Oecumenical Church, which through the Holy Fathers of the 3rd and 4th Oecumenical Councils approved the epistle of **St. Cyril of Alexandria** to Nestorius:

“And of how great diligence and skill there is need when the multitude of those grieved is so great, so that we may administer the healing word of truth to them that seek it. But this we shall accomplish most excellently if we shall turn over the words of the holy Fathers, and are zealous to obey their commands, proving ourselves, whether we be in the faith according to that which is written, and conform our thoughts to their upright and irreprehensible teaching” [9].

St. John Damascene taught in the same way:

“You see what great strength and divine zeal are given to those who venerate the images of the saints with faith and a pure conscience. Therefore, brethren, let us take our stand on the rock of the faith, and on the tradition of the Church, neither removing the boundaries laid down by our holy fathers of old, (Prov. 22.28) nor listening to those who would introduce innovation and destroy the economy of the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of God. If any man is to have his foolish way, in a short time the whole Organisation of the Church will be reduced to nothing”[10].

Let us re-examine the problems, which we discussed in the first part of our paper, using specified traditional methods of interpretation. For the gloss of the texts, we will use only texts of those St. Fathers, who were recognized as Saints by the Undivided Oecumenical Church (i.e. before the Great Schisma in 1054). Also we will use only the resolutions of Oecumenical Councils, adopted before this event in the Church history.

1. We have a multitude of statements of Saints, glorified by Undivided Oecumenical Church about the meaning of the word “day” (of Creation) in Ch. 1 - 2 of Genesis. They are: St.Dionysius the Areopagite, St.Justin Philosof, St.Theophilus of Antioch, St. Irenaeus of Lion, St. Hippolyte of Rome, St. Methodius Olympus, St.Aphanasius the Great, St.Ephrem of Syria and other St.Fathers. We shall give only three quotations from these fathers. The detailed selection of the quotes can be seen in [11, 12].

St.Dionysius the Areopagite “...And the light is both measure and number of hours, days, and all our time. For it is the light itself, even though it was then without form, which the divine Moses declared to have fixed that first Triad of our days” [13].

St.Justin Philosof. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead”[14].

St. Irenaeus of Lion. “The Lord, therefore, recapitulating in Himself this day, underwent His sufferings upon the day preceding the Sabbath, that is, the sixth day of the creation, on which day man was created; thus granting him a second creation by means of His passion, which is that [creation] out of death”[15, ch.23, n.2].

All these statements say unambiguously, that the notion “day” in the given biblical context was understood by these St. Fathers exclusively in the sense of an ordinary day, containing 24 hours. None of the St. Fathers, glorified by Undivided Oecumenical Church, have stated definitely and constantly in favor of a different way of understanding of the word “day” in the context considered. At least we have no information of such a sort.

2. We have a consensus opinion of St. Fathers of Undivided Oecumenical Church about the age of the world. Now this age, according St.Hippolyte of Rome, St.Theophilus of Anthioch, St. Irenaeus of Lion, St.Augustin, St.Isaac of Syria is about 7,5 thousand years. We cite three direct witnesses from St.Father’s writings:

St.Hippolyte of Rome (II cent. A.D.). “But one will always say, “How will you demonstrate to me whether the Savior was born in the five thousandth and five hundredth year? Be easily instructed, O man. For in the desert long ago under Moses there were models and images of spiritual mysteries which concerned the tabernacle *and* they fulfilled *this number*, so that having come to the utmost of truth in Christ⁴ you are able to apprehend these *things* which are fulfilled. For he says to him, “And you shall make an ark of incorruptible wood and you will gild it with pure gold inside and outside and you shall make its height two cubits and a half and its breadth a cubit and a half and its height a cubit and a half.” The measure of which added together makes five and a half cubits, so that the five thousand five hundred years may be demonstrated, in which time the Savior comes from the Virgin, *and then* he offered⁶ the Ark, his own body, into the world, gilded in pure gold, inside with the Word, outside with the Holy Spirit, so that the truth may be shown and the Ark may be manifested” [16, 24.1 - 24.3].

St.Theophilus of Anthioch (II cent. A.D.) “And from the foundation of the world the whole time is thus traced, so far as its main epochs are concerned. From the creation of the world to the deluge were 2242 years. And from the deluge to the time when Abraham our forefather begat a son, 1036 years. And from Isaac, Abraham’s son, to the time when the people dwelt with Moses in the desert, 660 years. And

from the death of Moses and the rule of Joshua the son of Nun, to the death of the patriarch David, 498 years. And from the death of David and the reign of Solomon to the sojourning of the people in the land of Babylon, 518 years 6 months 10 days. And from the government of Cyrus to the death of the Emperor Aurelius Verus, 744 years. All the years from the creation of the world amount to a total of 5698 years, and the odd months and days"[17, book 3, ch.28].

St. Irenaeus of Lion (115–202 A.D.) "For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says: "Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all His works." This is an account of the things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year" [15, ch.28, n.3]. (St.Irenaeus, as we can see here, acknowledges the days of creation, as corresponding to thousands of years of world's existence, and on this basis predicts the year of the Doomsday. This was a personal opinion of St Irenaeus and is clearly outside of the Scriptural doctrine (Math.24,36). Nonetheless, the age of the world was estimated by him in the same way as it was done by St.Hippolyte of Rome and St.Theophilus of Anthioch, as then not exceeding six millennia).

A similar estimate of the age of the world (about 7,5 thousands years today) can be readily derived from the words of St.Augustine (353–430 A.D.) in *De Civitate Dei* (book 12, ch.12) and in *De Genesi ad litteram*(ch.7), as well as from *The Ascetical Homilies* by St.Isaac of Syria (VI cent. A.D.) - Homilies 18 and 30, see [18] for more detail.

St. Fathers of the Undivided Oecumenical Church, who expressed in favor of essentially longer time periods for the world existence are not known to us.

Moreover, we can indicate a wording of the VII-th Oecumenical Council (Session 6), unanimously approved by it's Fathers, discovered by the recently martyred priest Fr. Daniel Sysoev, which he disclosed in the txt of "The Refutation of the Patched-up and falsely so-called Definition of the Disorderly Assembled Crew of the Christianity-detractors" ". In the first volume of this text we can read: "In the year of the world five thousand five hundred and one, Christ our God having come amongst men..." [19, P.315-316].

3. We can find a multitude of utterances of St. Fathers of the Undivided Oecumenical Church about the active creation of the world by God. They are: St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Theophilus of Antioch and many others (e.g. see above the quote from St.Justin).

St.John Chrysostom. "Now, we are in a position to learn from the Holy Spirit, through the tongue of this blessed author what things were created on the first day and what things on the other days. This itself is a mark of the considerateness of loving God. I mean, his all-powerful hand and boundless wisdom were not at a loss even to create everything in one day. Why say one day? Even in a brief moment. Yet it was not because of its utility to him that he produced anything that exists, since being self-sufficient he is need of nothing. It was rather out of his loving kindness and goodness that he created everything: according he created things in sequence and provided us with a clear instruction about created things through the tongue of the blessed author, so that we might learn about them precisely and not fall into the error of those led by purely human reasoning. You see, that there are still those, despite this manner of creation, who say that things get existence from themselves, what would these people not have been rash enough to invent in their anxiety to say and do everything against their own welfare, had not God employed such considerateness and instruction?"[20, n.12, P.45].

"When you hear "He made", concern yourself no further, but with head bowed believe what is said. For God it is who makes and transforms all things, and refashions all things according to his will"[20, n.6, P.32].

St. Basil the Great. “But God, before all those things which now attract our notice existed, after casting about in His mind and determining to bring into being time which had no being, imagined the world such as it ought to be, and created matter in harmony with the form which He wished to give it. He assigned to the heavens the nature adapted for the heavens, and gave to the earth an essence in accordance with its form. He formed, as He wished, fire, air and water, and gave to each the essence which the object of its existence required. Finally, He welded all the diverse parts of the universe by links of indissoluble attachment and established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony that the most distant, in spite of their distance, appeared united in one universal sympathy. Let those men therefore renounce their fabulous imaginations, who, in spite of the weakness of their argument, pretend to measure a power as incomprehensible to man's reason as it is unutterable by man's voice”[21, n.2].

St.Theophilus of Anthioch. “Who is the Physician? God, who heals and makes alive through His word and wisdom. God by His own word and wisdom made all things; for by His word were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” [17, book 1,ch.7].

Additional quotes can be found in [11] and [12].

We don't know any statement of Saints about divine creation of our world, which we could estimate as the God's “creation” in the sense of His permission.

In that way, the three basic creationist ideas, which in the framework of logical analysis turned out only hypothetical statements (as we tried to show analysing one of the most tested issues of this approach), in the framework of traditional Church approach acquire the character of definite truth.

It seems, that the present approach can and must form the basis for the solutions of the fundamental problems, connected with biblical paradigm of creation researches.

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