

NOT A SOURCE OF FOOLISH WISDOM

A Sequel to
"Rationalism and Fundamentalism — The Two Banes of Western Theology"

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

From the time of Darwin, as many as have concerned themselves with the subject of creation — be they atheist or theistic rationalists — both had one basic presupposition, which was the offspring of the world-view of Western Rationalism. They thought that if science is true, the first chapter of Genesis is proven false. Thus, the atheists sought by arguments to prove the truth of their science, thinking that, in this manner, they were attacking Holy Writ and faith in God; on the other side, the theistic rationalists did nothing else but confirm the former in their error by seeking desperately to prove that contemporary science was not true — for they too thought that if science is proven true, their faith is proven false. Thus the air was filled with the din of "proofs" and counter "proofs," each side wallowing in a horrible mire of truth incredibly intermingled with falsehood. But, in itself, science — "first degree knowledge" — can neither confirm, nor refute, the account of Genesis, as properly understood by the Church Fathers; for, as we showed in the article, "Rationalism and Fundamentalism," the arguments of both the atheistic and the theistic rationalists are irrelevant to that level of knowledge that the Holy Scriptures seek to reveal to us.

We have demonstrated that the Holy Scriptures are not to be read as a "first-degree knowledge," science textbook, especially when read with "extreme literalism." But the same is true also of the God-bearing Church Fathers.

In Psalm 104:21, it says, "the sun knoweth his going down." From a literal and scientific point of view, this is a very interesting passage. The sun "knoweth." Since we are dealing with a sun that has intelligence, we have to watch our step. Leaving aside this formidable philosophical and theological problem with all its implications, let us proceed to the next point. Assuming that the sun "knoweth" what he is doing, why does he go "down?" Doesn't he know that we go around him? Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that, in the Psalmist's day, he *was* still going around us. (Can anyone prove conclusively that he *wasn't* going around us in those days? Maybe, smart sun that he is, he changed his course in the sixteenth century after Christ, when the Pope changed the calendar. After all, nobody with brains wants to get in the way of a Latin inquisition).

From the point of view of "third degree knowledge," we can say that the "scientific" problem does not concern us in the least.

In like manner, a God-inspired Father of the Church, St. Basil makes some *very* interesting scientific observations. In *Hexaemeron*, he notes that "pines, when cut down or even submitted to the action of fire, are changed into a forest of oaks." An interesting observation. I wonder what a rabid Darwinist would say to that? If the Saint believed that the pines changed into marble pillars, would that scandalize us? If God can raise up sons

of Abraham from stones, who am I to quibble over the extent of His powers to do even this? Later on, St. Basil tells us that lionesses give birth, "with great difficulty," to only one cub at a time (would that domestic female cats were aware of this); that vipers are born by gnawing through the womb, thus "inflicting a proper punishment on their mother," and finally, that elephants, in the Saint's day, didn't have joints in their feet. As an Orthodox Christian, I believe that if the poor creatures could get around without joints in their feet, God bless them!*

For people who understand the significance of the Three Degrees of Knowledge that St. Isaac the Syrian speaks about, I believe St. Basil's "scientific" observations have no relevance to the doctrinal and moral authority of either the Scriptures or St. Basil. I do not look to either of them for scientific "truth." ("Why should I, when science is having a hard enough time searching around for "truths"?) God is able to make elephants with or without joints. He can make a sun with brains, and He can make it go up, or down, or around. He can do things even greater than this. He can resurrect and restore a friend who has been dead for four days and has begun to stink already because of the decomposition of his body. He can even make the passing shadow of a former apostate disciple work healings.

In any case, we should understand by now how wrong it is to drag the Holy Scriptures or the God-bearing Saints into such "scientific" discussions. I write "scientific" in quotation marks, because I wonder whose science we would use to prove our point? The science of our century, or of some future century?

When doing research, the good student knows that he has to go to the appropriate sources to get the information he needs.

Would we go to our local nephrologist to ask him his opinion about the Sixth Ecumenical Council's resolution on the Monothelites? Or would we approach the pilot on our commercial flight and ask him what his thoughts are on the Prophet Moses having seen "the back parts of God," as it says in the Holy Scriptures?

Unless your nephrologist or jet pilot were theologians (in the true sense, not in the academic sense), you would probably answer no.

By the same token, we would not approach the spiritual father of our local monastery and ask him to perform brain surgery on our children.

We will enter into the mystery of the Church's teaching on this matter only if we come with meekness and humility, like little children. Let us not forget: theology —

*Before we laugh too loudly, we should remember that the Saint was only repeating what he had learned in Athens from the best scientific minds of the day.

Ah, the magical charm of science! It is forever changing its views, and yet it forever appears infallible in the eyes of men.

"speech concerning God" — is a mystery, and the only ones who can speak with divine authority are those who have entered the Holy of holies: the Saints of God. St. Gregory the Theologian asks, "Who is the man that can speak concerning things divine?" — "*Tís o theologón ánthropos?*" — and he goes on to explain that it is only he whose "eyes" have been enlightened by divine grace, for "in Thy light, we shall see light." For most of us, that means following in the footsteps of those that have "enlightened eyes," the Fathers. When read with a correct understanding of the Three Degrees of Knowledge, the Saints are, like the Holy Scriptures, *not* a source of "foolish wisdom," but of "the knowledge that passeth all understanding."

**"Shall I prefer the foolish wisdom [of men] to the oracles of God?"
St. Basil the Great**