

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PRESERVATION OF CREATION

Inseparable from Divine Providence is the Preservation of the Creation,<sup>1</sup> which is a positive and continuous Act of God that sustains all beings, secures the order of nature and maintains the Universe. As with the Providence of God, likewise the Preservation of Creation differs from the Creation in that no new Creation is produced. All creatures that already exist are protected from extinction and yet this Preservation differs from the Governing of the world that secures the perfect end thereof as planned by the Divine Will. However, this difference is a concept of our limited minds as it does not exist in reality.

The Truth that has always been proclaimed by Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church according to which God intervenes to sustain the world, was denied by those who separated the Creator from His Creation (Deism), as well as by those who confused God with the world (Pantheism).

God's Intervention in order to sustain the Cosmos does not remove the power of the laws of nature. On the contrary, even nature seeks God's Intervention so that it is not led into disorder (in Greek "*ataxia*") or extinction. Furthermore, the idea that the Universe has no need of the preservative Providence of God is similar to the heretical teaching of Dualism that proclaimed the Cosmos as an

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<sup>1</sup> Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 73-74.

individual principle that opposes God. This theory separates God from our lives by completely destroying the development of our relationship with Him and putting our Communion with Him in danger.

### **1. Definition and Difference**

Divine Preservation is inseparable from Divine Providence. It is examined separately, however, because of our limited understanding and is considered to be an Act of God through which all catastrophic forces that threaten the existence of the Universe, are abolished. Thus, when we use the term “*Divine Preservation*” we do not simply mean God’s consenting to the continuous existence of the Universe, but that through His Intervention, He causes the preservation of the Cosmos, guarding through His Almighty Will not only the whole Universe, but every atom of every element from which the Universe is composed. It is understandable, however, that this Divine Intervention does not exclude the synergy of the natural powers that do not exist independently, but through God’s creative Will. This synergy is renounced by the theory of “*occasionalism*,” whereby everything is the Action of God and credits all consequences to God, as for example matters of the inanimate world such the warmth of fire being emitted by God rather than the combustion of the elements of the fire causing the radiation of heat. In addition, this theory also erroneously believes that the movements of animate beings are not performed according to the creatures’ wills, but according to God’s Will.

The synergy of secondary causes does not exclude God's Preservation nor does it prevent one creature from being under the influence of another because although God is the main cause of the conservation of everything in the world, the creatures are real and exist as beings whose existence is continuously preserved by God. The Preservative Action of God is incessant and contributes directly to the perpetuation of their existence.

According to the above, although the Preservation of the Universe is connected to the Creation, both being the result of the one Action of God, it is different to the Creation. This is easily understood when we acknowledge that the Creation was the cause of Universe and the reason for its existence. Nonetheless, Divine Preservation does not produce any new creatures and those that already exist are preserved and do not revert to the nothingness out of which they were created.

Divine Preservation could be considered as a continuous Creation ("*Conservatio continua creation*") whereby all that has been brought into existence from non-existence, continues to exist and is preserved by the Divine Power that created them from nothingness. Thus, the Creative Action of God brought everything from nothingness into being whereas the Preservative Action of God presupposes their existence. And although in the Creation God Acted alone, in Divine Preservation the Creative Action of God co-operates with the laws of nature that He had established so that the Universe will continue without reverting to non-existence.

Divine Preservation of the world must be distinguished from the Divine Governing of the Cosmos. Undoubtedly, with regard to God, the Governing of the world is inseparable from the Preservation, as both are inseparable from Divine Providence. However, due to our limited understanding, Divine Preservation is distinguished from Divine Governing so that we may examine each aspect systematically. Furthermore, Divine Preservation secures the natural order and preservation of creatures whereas Divine Governing secures the progress of the Cosmos to its final and perfect end as predetermined by God.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Teaching of Holy Scripture

A few classical verses of Holy Scripture that witness the preservation of the world as being directly due to Almighty God are Colossians 1:17, in which St Paul stated that “...*all things consist...*” of God; Acts 17:28 in which St Luke wrote: “...*we live and move and have our being...*” in God and Psalm 104(105):27-30 wherein King David wrote “*These all wait for Thee, that Thou may give them their food in due season. What Thou give them, they gather in; Thou openest Thy Hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy Face, they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth.*”

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<sup>2</sup> Trempeles, *Dogmatique*, v. I, pp. 372-374.

In the Apocrypha or Second Canonical Books of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint, O'), known as the "Anaginoscomena" meaning "Books that are worthy to be read," we read:

1) Wisdom of Solomon 11:24-26: "*But Thou hast mercy upon all; for Thou can do all things, and wink at the sins of men, because they should amend. For Thou lovest all the things that are and abhor nothing which Thou hast made; for never would Thou have made anything if Thou had hated it. And how could any thing have endured, if it had not been Thy Will? Or been preserved, if not called by Thee? But Thou sparest all: for they are Thine, O Lord, Thou Lover of souls.*"

2) Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-14: "*For God made not death; neither has He pleasure in the destruction of the living. For He had created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth.*"

3) 2 Maccabees 8:18: "*But our confidence is in the Almighty God Who, at a beckon, can cast down both them that come against us, and also all the world.*"

Consequently, the world in general and especially the spiritual world are destined to exist forever. This Truth is not undermined by the fact that some plants or animals that existed on earth thousands or millions of years ago, are now extinct. Only spiritual beings are not

subject to extinction, as they are the main concern of Divine Providence.<sup>3</sup>

Holy Scripture confirms that God uses natural and spiritual forces as well as the general laws of nature to preserve the Cosmos. Thus it is written that God “...covers the Heavens with clouds...” “...prepares rain for the earth...” “...makes grass to grow on the mountains...” “...gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry.”<sup>4</sup> “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”<sup>5</sup> He allowed “...in bygone generations all nations to walk in their own ways...” and “nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons..” filling men’s “...hearts with food and gladness.”<sup>6</sup> “He gives to all Life, breath, and all things...”<sup>7</sup> “...Who works all in all.”<sup>8</sup> To God “...the eyes of all look expectantly...” for He gives “...them their food in due season...” and satisfies “...the desire of every living thing.”<sup>9</sup> So each and every one of us can cry out: “Thy Hands formed me and made me; afterwards Thou didst change Thy mind, and smite me” and “Thou didst bestow upon me Life and Mercy, and Thine oversight hast preserved my spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 147(148):8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Matth. 5:45.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 14:15-17.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 17:25.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinth. 12:6.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 145(146):15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Job 10:8, 12.

### 3. The Teaching of the Holy Fathers

The Teachings of the Holy Fathers and ecclesiastic scholars of the Orthodox Church are in full agreement with the Teachings of Holy Scripture.

Thus *The Shepherd of Hermas* proclaims that “...all Creation is sustained by the Son of God.”<sup>11</sup>

St Clement of Rome in his First Letter to the Church of Corinth declared that “...the Heavens move at His direction and obey Him in peace.” “Moreover, the incomprehensible depths of the Abysses and the indescribable Judgements of the underworld are constrained by the same Ordinances...” and that “...all these things the great Creator and Master of the Universe ordered to exist in peace and harmony, thus doing good to all things, but especially abundantly to us who have taken refuge in His Compassionate Mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

Theophilus of Antioch, addressing Autolykos, noted that God is called “...Pantocrator, because He upholds and sustains everything.” Continuing, he urged all men to comprehend “...the Providence of God Who prepares food for all things...” and Who “...brings out the sweet Light from His Treasuries, guides the clouds from the ends of

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<sup>11</sup> *Shepherd of Hermas*, Parable 9, 14, § 5, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 274.

<sup>12</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 20, 1-12, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 39-40.

*the earth and the lightning, changing them into rain; He Who sends thunder to frighten.*”<sup>13</sup>

St Athanasios the Great of Alexandria, indicating the synergy between the Preservation of God and the laws of nature, noted that “...*by the Action and Power of the Word of the Father, the firmament turns around, the stars move, the sun shines, the moon patrols and the winds blow...*” “...*and generally everything becomes alive and moves.*” “*And the Word moves and adorns all things that compose the one Cosmos, and sustains and gives Life through His simple Movement and Providence. He is the Governor and King of all.*”<sup>14</sup>

St Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzos, stressing the close relationship between the Preservative and Creative Action of God, asks the following question: “*How was everything made unless God made all things and gave them their being?*”<sup>15</sup>

St Basil the Great noted that God, through His Creative Action, gave existence to the non-existing and sustains all that already exists.<sup>16</sup>

St John Chrysostom stated that God “...*not only Created the Universe, but sustains it...*” as well. “*It would*

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<sup>13</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *I Autolycus*, §§ 4 and 6, in **B**, v. 5, pp. 14 and 16.

<sup>14</sup> St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Greeks*, § 44, in Migne, *P.G.*, 25, 88.

<sup>15</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 28*, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 32.

<sup>16</sup> St. Basil the Great, *About the Holy Spirit*, VIII, § 19, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 101.

*be madness...*” he continued, “...to think that anyone who sees in the Universe the mass of the Heavenly bodies with such beauty, such synthesis, such continuous battle between matter and their distribution, would not think and would not say that if there was no Providence that would uphold all the mass of the Heavenly bodies, then everything would have fallen and nothing would have survived from what is now order and harmonious synthesis.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, because of the Providence and Preservation of God, the Universe is sustained “...with such good order, such agreement between day and night, such variety of animals and plants and seeds and herbs, which continue their path in the present day and yet have not fallen, neither once dissolved.”<sup>18</sup>

St Basil the Great expressed the Truth that the Preservative Action of God is not only general, protecting the entire Cosmos but also extends to each and every one of the creatures individually. “*In all the nature of the Universe, the visible and invisible, the Creator Word offers assistance according to the needs of each species, in various ways because of the multi-species.*”<sup>19</sup> The Preservation of each species is fulfilled according to their different natures and that of minerals and inanimate Creation is accomplished by the cooperation between Divine Providence and the laws of nature. The galaxies, the suns, the planets and their moons, are thereby

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<sup>17</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Against Anomoiou*, Homily 12, § 4, in in Montfaucon, v. 1, p. 679.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, *To Statues*, Homily 9, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 109.

<sup>19</sup> St. Basil the Great, *About the Holy Spirit*, VIII, § 19, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 101.

maintained in keeping with their established order and movement. In addition, God preserves the different kinds of species of plants and animals since they, too, play an important role in the conservation of their realm. This explains the extinction of some species whereas the Preservation of rational and moral creatures is accomplished according to:

1. their natural composition, the relationship between them and a relative synergy with the laws of nature, and
2. their rational and moral actions, by means of the synergy between Divine Providence and their free will, being fully aware of their actions.

The Preservation of mankind is a special concern of God's Providence, for he is the centre and goal of all Creation, his existence being extended beyond death.

God intervenes directly and indirectly. He strengthens the vital powers of man directly through food that is offered by means of plants or animals. Beneficial weather conditions cause vegetation to grow and multiply, as well as all life dependent thereon. St Cyril of Alexandria speaking of the direct intervention of God says: "*God gives Life to all in nature, being their Creator.*"<sup>20</sup> The manner of God's direct intervention in order to sustain and preserve all things is beyond any rational understanding and all we know is that this Divine

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<sup>20</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *In John*, book IX, ch. 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 74, 232.

Preservation does not cause weariness to or reduction of the Deity. As St John Chrysostom noted, “...even if the Word had to create tens of thousands of worlds, or even infinite numbers, He would remain the same, not decreasing nor falling into disuse because of the many Creations...” and “...not only [does] He Create...” the immeasurable Cosmos and all it contains “...but sustains them after their Creation.”<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. The Absolute Necessity of God’s Intervention**

God’s direct or indirect Intervention in preserving the world is considered an absolute necessity. This fact originates from the mortality of the creatures that God Created. For the Source of their existence does not originate from themselves, but from the Absolute Being. Therefore, they continue to exist because of their continuous and uninterrupted Communion with the Source of Life. If God released His Work of the Creation, just as an Architect, having completed his work, leaves the structure he has designed, then as soon as Divine Providence no longer supported its existence, Creation would become extinct along with the entire Cosmos.<sup>22</sup>

The Universe is not a mechanical work of art but a living Organism receiving Life from the Source of Life. A branch that is cut off from a tree, withers and dies. In the same way, the world cannot exist without Divine Providence. Similarly, if our own bodies cannot remain

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<sup>21</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 5*, § 3, in in Montfaucon, v. 8, p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> St. Augustine, *De Genesis ad litteram*, IV, 12; V, c. 20 § 40 and VIII, c. 26, in migne, *P.L.*, 34, 304; 333 and 391.

forever young but instead perish, despite all the nurturing and medication when necessary, how then could the Cosmos exist if it did not receive such nurturing Divine Providence? St John Chrysostom concluded that Sustaining the world is greater than Creating it, because through Creation God brought everything from nothingness into being, but through His Divine Providence and Preservation He sustains the whole Cosmos, and this is proof of His Almightyness.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *To Statues*, Homily 10 § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 49, 113. Ibid, *To Hebrews*, Homily 2, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 810-811.