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## The Benefit of the Contemplation of Nature in the *Hexaemeron* of Saint Basil the Great

### Abstract

In Saint Basil and other Fathers, the main argument for the existence of God is the order of the world (*diakosmesis, eukosmia, eutaxia*)<sup>1</sup>, also called wisdom, harmony, or beauty.

However, this argument is not reached by the exclusive exercise of autonomous reason, which extracts the rationalities of the creatures from the world. Therefore, the world's order (or rationality) is *testimony* rather than *argument* in the scholastic or logical-philosophical sense. This is why the Church Fathers can



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<sup>1</sup> P. Tomáš Špidlík S. J., *The Spirituality of the Christian East. I. Systematic manual*, second edition, translation and presentation by a deacon. Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2005, p. 168.

speak of 'natural revelation'<sup>2</sup> rather than rational "arguments" for the existence of God. However, according to Scriptures, "the invisible things of God" (Rom. 1: 19) are seen by thought in creatures, so a kind of intuition or inferring perceives them, both His existence and His attributes. On the other hand, we do not know God in His essence, and even the smallest creature is in essence unknown. But "it is so wonderful what it falls under our senses"! The universe is sustained through ingenious rationality. Creation is a miracle, and only God performs miracles!

### Keywords

the rationality of the universe, right measure, miracles of Creation, the existence of God, fine tuning

## 1 Introduction

The book of Hexameron, including the homilies delivered by Saint Basil in the Church, is the first extensive patristic work in which natural sciences, philosophical knowledge,<sup>3</sup> and theology

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<sup>2</sup> By 'natural revelation' I mean, in this paper, the self-disclosure of God's existence through nature in the conscience of a contemplator.

<sup>3</sup> See Saint Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, translated by Sister Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P., in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 46, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 1963, p. xi: „For his exposition of the universe and its plant and animal life, he drew upon the teachings of Plato, Plotinus, Aratus, Theophrastus, Herodotus, Aristotle, and others. In his accounts of animals, insects, birds, and fish, drawn especially from Herodotus and Aristotle, he made fables, in which he described the habits, tendencies, and dispositions of the various creatures, then he drew a moral lesson which he applied to his hearers”. Also, Saint Basil in *Hexameron* "is quite familiar with the positions of different natural philosophers and current with the disputed questions of natural science. [...] He uses his knowledge of natural science both to praise God and to put reason in its proper place." (Stephen M. Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea*,

are put together to strengthen faith, as well as to lift the mind and hearts of listeners from contemplating nature to understanding more accurately the existence and goals of God, to wonder and love the works of the Creator. *Hexaemeron* insists at length on the quality of the world and of creatures of being a "school" and a "guide" for "souls endowed with the reason (εἴπερ τῶ ὄντι ψυχῶν λογικῶν διδασκαλεῖον καὶ θεογνωσίας ἐστὶ παιδευτήριον)"<sup>4</sup>, from the seen understanding the unseen, that is, the existence, power and wisdom of the Creator. I will begin to quote Saint Basil with a fragment that sums up his thoughts on what we now call "natural revelation" in Orthodox theology, or "natural theology" in Western denominations:

"May God, who created such mighty things and ordained that these petty words be spoken, grant to you an understanding of His truth in its entirety, in order that from visible objects you may comprehend the invisible Being, and from the greatness and beauty of creatures you may conceive the proper idea concerning our Creator. 'For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen – his everlasting power also and divinity.' (Rom. 1, 19.) Therefore, in the earth, in the air, and in the heavens, in water, in night and in day, and in all things visible (καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ὀρωμένοις), clear reminders of the Benefactor grip us (ἐναργῆ λαμβάνειν ἡμᾶς τοῦ Εὐεργέτου τὰ ὑπομνήματα)."<sup>5</sup>

The *Hexaemeron* abounds with ideas and developments on the theme of the revelation of the existence of the Creator in the

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Baker Academic, 2014, chapter 3, pp. 37-38, [www.bakeracademic.com](http://www.bakeracademic.com).)

<sup>4</sup> P.G. 29, col. 16 C. Saint Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, I: VI, in *Writings, Part I* (collection PSB 17), translation, introduction and notes by Pr. D. Fecioru, EIMBOR, Bucharest, 1986, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> P.G. col. 77 B, C. Saint Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, Washington D.C., 1963, p. 54. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), III: X, p. 109.

wisdom and rational order imprinted in creatures. In fact, the central theme of this book of St. Basil the Great is the description of the wonderful wisdom of the Creator of the heavens, in order to strengthen the conviction in His existence, in His wisdom and His care, as well as to find reason to admire the Creator and for doxology. Moreover, the rationality and even ingenuity imbued in creatures ("the intelligence of matter" said a contemporary author<sup>6</sup>) make us speak of "the wonders of creation (εἰς θεωρίαν τοῦ περὶ τὴν κτίσιν θαύματος)"<sup>7</sup> or even "the marvels (τὰ θαύματα) of creation"<sup>8</sup>, whose description in Saint Basil is not cold or indifferent like a treatise on biology, but full of wonder on the part of the beholder and admiration for the Creator, so that "the account of the Master's wonders is sweet to the ears of His servants"<sup>9</sup>. And "if you seek their meaning, then the great wonder of the wisdom of the Creator comes to light"<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, the act of contemplating the divine reason and wisdom in creatures *is not only an act of reason*, but also an act of wonder and awe, as a kind of sense of overwhelm, when reason understands the supermeaning, namely that the wisdom of Creation is far beyond its powers of comprehension. But to feel one's own powerlessness in knowledge is also a moment of humility and self-surpassing, for reason gives up claims to autoreferentiality and autonomy or knowledge by itself, as it feels itself overcome by the wisdom of Creation, by the harmony of creatures and the order of their so complexly interwoven rationalities. And this contemplation is not only about reason, but also about spirit,

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<sup>6</sup> Dumitru Constantin-Dulcan, *The intelligence of the matter*, 3rd edition, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> P.G. 29, col. 161 B. Saint Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, VII: VI, in *Writings, Part I* (PSB 17), EIBMBOR, 1986, p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> P.G. 29, col. 164 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VII: VI, p. 155 and p. 156.

<sup>9</sup> P.G. 29, col. 164 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VII: VI, p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> P.G. 29, col. 184 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: VIII, p. 167.

about overcoming reason in the recognition of its limits. For now, man not only reasons but *admires* and  *marvels*. In contemplating the beauty and wisdom of Creation, having reached the upper limit of reason's power, the only rational attitude that remains is admiration, wonder and recognition of the creature's own limits, together with the recognition of a rational, all-powerful and all-knowing Cause at the origin of the rationality (or wisdom), energy and harmony of Creation, which alone have the gift of overwhelming reason.

What I want to emphasize (as a rational background of the idea of Saint Basil the Great) is that the attitude of wonder in the face of the "wonders" of Creation is fully in line with reason and not just a subjective emotion, but an objective recognition of the *factual* truth that reason is overwhelmed by a wisdom and power infinitely beyond itself and dead matter, and that, nevertheless, having to find, according to the law of causality ingrained in it, a cause of everything, it understands that this Cause is beyond both the universe and the powers of reason. Thus the very attitude of wonder of reason in the face of the rationality of Creation is both natural and rational, and not merely subjective, but the natural expression of the objective truth that created reason has rationally found its own limits in scrutinizing the complexity of the rationality of the universe and is nevertheless compelled to recognize that this universe has a cause. Therefore, faith is in keeping with reason, and according to the Psalms and the Fathers, "foolish" is he who says "in his heart" that "there is no God".

"From the beauty of the things seen, let us understand Him Who is above beauty, and from the greatness of the things that fall under our senses and from these limited bodies of the world let us take our minds to the boundless One, to Him Who is above greatness, Who surpasses all the mind with the multitude of His power. It is true, we know not the nature of

existences (εἰ καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἀγνοοῦμεν τῶν γενομένων); but it is so wonderful (ἔχει τὸ θαῦμα) that what falls upon our senses, that the keenest mind is found powerless before the smallest creature in the world, either to describe it properly, or to give due praise to the Creator..."<sup>11</sup>

So natural revelation is God's gift to those who have the capacity to wonder and admire, acknowledging that the cosmic rationality is above reason. But this very movement of the mind (of wonder and admiration) presupposes, along with the work of reason to draw reason and wisdom from the univers, a capacity for a kind of outflow of the spirit. This is to wonder, having a sense of the endlessly complex whole of creatures, yet held in order and harmony according to some order, reason, or law, of which creatures are unaware, but without which nothing can subsist or move. So the purpose of researching the reasons for creation in the saints is, as St Maximus Confessor also said, wonder, admiration of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, and therefore glorifying Him.

"That I have sought not to dwell longer on them, lest I should seem to overstep the mark; but you, a man fond of research, think of all these things for yourself; and, knowing in all things the wisdom of God (τοῦ Θεοῦ σοφίαν), never cease to admire (μὴ λήξης ποτὲ τοῦ θαύματος) and glorify (δοξάζειν) the Creator (τὸν Ποιητήν) through all Creation (διὰ πάσης τῆς κτίσεως)." <sup>12</sup>

By carefully observing the right order of the arrangement and the way of the creatures, how they blend and combine in harmony and tuning with each other, "you have, therefore, the heaven beautified, the earth adorned, the sea enriched with the living creatures born in it, the sky full of the birds that fly through

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<sup>11</sup> P.G. 29, col. 28 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), I: XI, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> P.G. 29 col. 180 D, col. 181 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII, VII, p. 165.

it"<sup>13</sup>, so that from all of them you are left with the impression of measure and harmony and matching between them as a whole.

"So true is the word that in what is created (έν τοῖς κτισθεῖσι) you can find (δυνατόν εὔρεθῆναι) nothing superfluous (οὐδέν περιττόν) and no lacking (οὐδὲ ἐλλεῖπον)."<sup>14</sup>

The proper measure, present and working in all creatures and their ordinances, is in itself a testimony to the wisdom of the Creator, Who not only created, but also cares for all created things in the finest detail. This fitting and well-ordered measure in all is essentially the root of the modern argument about the 'anthropic principle', 'fine tuning' or 'irreducible complexity' that a significant proportion of today's scientists speak of. And all these developments of the philosophy of science or the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> P.G. 29, col. 201 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX, V, p. 177. This idea will also be found, three centuries later, in the thought of St Maximus Confessor, who states that "perfect are all things created with wisdom and care (according to the reason according to which they were created) and those which have been made, for it is not possible that they should be otherwise good than as they are, not needing to be added to or diminished in order to be otherwise good" (*Ambigua* 57, translation, introduction and notes by Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 255-256.) It remains to be seen how this argument of the sufficient rationality of the creature is related to subsequent arguments in the history of thought, such as Descartes' cosmological argument and, in recent times, the anthropological principle (or "fine tuning") and "irreducible complexity", a concept launched, within the *Intelligent Design* movement, by the scholar Michael Behe. In fact, from a logical point of view, St Basil's argument, further developed by St Maxim, is the essence or root from which the other modern arguments I have just mentioned branch out. It is interesting to note how the Holy Fathers of the Church made such a fine and profound overall philosophical observation, which modern and recent scientific discoveries have made only after much investigation. On the *anthropic principle* and *fine tuning*, see more in the book *Science and Faith. Testimonies of Scientists*, by Ioan Bute, and on Michael Behe and "irreducible complexity" in the book *Does Evolutionism Have Scientific Evidence?* by the same author.

*Intelligent Design* school today find a basis in the statement of St. Basil:

"Our God has created (ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ἔκτισε) nothing beyond need (οὐδὲν περιττότερον τῆς χρείας), nor has he left any of the things that are absolutely necessary (οὔτε μὴν ἐλλείπον τι τι τῶν ἀναγκαίων)."<sup>15</sup>

We could say that this is, logically not quantitatively, one of the central statements in *Hexaemeron*, the idea that summarizes or concentrates all the detailed descriptions of Saint Basil about the precise rationality of living beings, an indication of an initial plan with them. It is one with the latest scientific idea of fine tuning. It's just another language, but essentially the same idea. And though the non-living creatures have no reason, they have imprinted in them, in the composition and the ordinances of their being, all that they need for survival and prosperity, so that though they have no reason, they have an ingenious functionality, that is, they have rationality imprinted in the very instincts and laws that govern<sup>16</sup> them. For "God, Who created them, has replaced in them the lack of reason with the richness of sense"<sup>17</sup>. And this ingenious and appropriate rationality of seen existences (which St. Basil describes in detail in many living things in the water, in the air and on land) leads us to conclude that it could not have come about by chance, for how could living things lacking intelligence have "senses", instincts and ordinances so well coordinated and harmonized with each other and with the environment as to surpass in ingenuity even the

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<sup>15</sup> P.G. 29, col. 186 A, B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: VII, p. 167.

<sup>16</sup> "Fish are not endowed with reason, but they have a strong foundation in the law of nature that tells them what to do." (P.G. 29, col. 157 A; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, VII: IV, p. 152.)

<sup>17</sup> P.G. 29, col. 197 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: IV, p. 175. Today we say that animals have instincts. But instincts are, in fact, also principles or laws that animals follow.



applications and explanations of human intelligence? So, whence intelligence imprinted in the functioning of living things lacking intelligence and unable to be conscious of intelligence? The beings move according to clear purposes for each one and not as if carried by chance or hazard. So how could those which do not move by chance be the fruit of chance? "That each of the creatures (ἕκαστον δὲ τῶν γενομένων) fulfills (πληροῖ) its meaning (ἴδιόν λόγον) in Creation (ἐν τῇ κτίσει)."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, after describing the ingenuity and precision of the instincts of some animals, St. Basil concludes with a phrase that can also be taken as an argument-testimony against that evolutionary faith which asserts that what is seen, with all its rationalities and laws, arose by chance. That is, the constant laws of instincts, applied knowledge, and the complex organization of living things do not indicate chance as a cause:

"These are a proof that the nature of all living things has not learned from anyone what is useful, and that nothing is without order or purpose, but all (ἀλλὰ πάντα) bear the marks (ἴχνη φέρειν) of the wisdom of Him who made them (τῆς τοῦ ποιήσαντος σοφίας), showing in them (ἐν ἑαυτοῖς δεικνύντα) that they were brought into the world ready prepared (ἐμπαράσκευα) for the guard of their salvation (πρὸς τὴν φυλακὴν τῆς οἰκείας αὐτῶν σωτηρίας)."<sup>19</sup>

Let us first note, in this quotation, the simultaneous presence of empirical observation, inductive intuition, logical-philosophical reasoning and natural revelation. Some living creatures have behaviours that are ingrained in their nature, complex behaviours, without having learned them from anyone else<sup>20</sup>, not even their parents. This shows that there is an original plan

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<sup>18</sup> P.G. 29, col. 101 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), V: IV, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> P.G. 29, col. 197 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: IV, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> P.G. 29, col. 193A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: III, p. 173.

in them, not a chance evolution, but *that* they <sup>21</sup>have been endowed with these instincts and behaviours not by chance, but by a wise Creator. For example, there are animals that use medicinal herbs to cure themselves of certain diseases<sup>22</sup>, and others predict changes in the weather<sup>23</sup>, as if this knowledge was imprinted in their nature.

"Now, what are we men taught by these acts? Not only that the solicitude of our Creator extends through all things, but

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<sup>21</sup> This locution, "as if" ("als ob"), is often emphasized by recent theorists of science as the basic formula by which the formulations of scientific discoveries are indicated, i.e. it is a way of expressing the logical core of the "scientific model" method.

<sup>22</sup> P.G. 29, col. 193A. *Hexaameron*, PSB 17, IX: III, p. 173. "Neither the art that deals with gathering plants for study, nor the science of plants, has taught the non-living things what plants are for; and yet every living thing has naturally the skill of procuring what is for its use and salvation; it has in it something mysterious that tells it what suits its nature." (P.G. 29, col. 196 B; *Hexaameron*, PSB 17, IX: III, p. 174.) "The reason that dwells in you is skillful to protect you from harmful things. Do not sheep and goats know how to flee from the weeds that endanger their lives only because of their sense, which distinguishes the harmful ones? And you, who are endowed with reason, you, whom medical science helps, whom the experience of those who have been injured before teaches you to avoid, tell me, do you find it difficult to get away from poisonous plants?" (P.G. 29, col. 101 B, C; *Hexaameron*, PSB 17, IX: III, p. 123.) The proper measure in all things, according to the saying that God made nothing superfluous, is also seen in medicinal plants: "None of the herbs made by God is superfluous, not useless: either they give food to one of the unborn, or they are discovered by medical science for the cure of our diseases." (P.G. 29, col. 101 C; PSB 17, IX: III, p. 123.) Here is an explication by empirical observation of the "precise rationality" spoken of above where Saint Basil states that the created have no lack and no superfluity in order to survive and progress according to the divine intentions with them, i.e. "in the created you can find nothing superfluous and no lack" (P.G. 29, col. 201 B; *Hexaameron*, PSB 17, IX: V, p. 177).

<sup>23</sup> P.G. 29, col. 193 B. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), IX: III, p. 173.

also that there is among brute beasts a certain sense perception of the future."<sup>24</sup>

A part of modern science also talks about this "perception of the future" of living organisms, but of course using different terms and theoretical foundations. We recall assertions about an intelligent design present in living things from the moment of their conception (as the scientist Nicolae Paulescu pointed out) or the 'teleological' aspect of organisms, as the Nobel Prize winner Jacque Monod put it. St. Basil the Great certainly did not have as a priority to combat any atheistic teaching (like one of the modern ones) about the creation of the world, but to instil in the hearts of his listeners (who were practising Christians) a longing for God, piety and the strengthening of faith in Him by stimulating the capacity for wonder at the divine wisdom in Creation. This was the purpose served by long, detailed descriptions of the 'wonders' of Creation. And the guide in these forays was the Scriptural account of the days of creation. The frequent references to the words of Scripture with which St. Basil interwove his words show the importance he attached to the concordance and unity between natural and supernatural Revelation (expressions not used then, but in modern theological language from orthodox authors).

Moreover, in keeping with the pedagogical character of Creation, "school of the unseen" and mirroring the wisdom and intentions of God, apart from natural Revelation there is another way to use our souls from contemplating "this great and varied workshop of divine creation (τῆς θείας δημιουργίας ἐργαστήριον)"<sup>25</sup>. Namely, just as Scripture is a book that reveals the words of God,

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<sup>24</sup> P.G. 29, col. 193 B, C. *Hexaemeron*, IX: III, in Saint Basil, *Exegetic Homilies*, Wastington D.C., 1963, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> P.G. 29, col. 80 B. Saint Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, IV: I, in *Writings, Part I* (PSB 17), EIBMBOR, 1986, p. 110.

bearing witness to His existence and wisdom, but also giving us parables for our living in virtue, so Creation is a book that reveals "the words of God pervading Creation (ῥῆμα Θεοῦ διὰ τῆς κτίσεως τρέχον)"<sup>26</sup> from the beginning, from the making of the world, constantly working and bearing witness to God's existence and wisdom, but also giving us parables to follow in our living. For example, we can take our example of good and virtuous living even from the least of beings. The fact that creatures "have a perception of the future (τοῦ μέλλοντος ἀΐσθησιν)"<sup>27</sup> and care for their own preservation and the future of their own and their descendants in this life should be a lesson for us to care for our future in the next life.

"This teaches us not to melt for the life here, but let all our covetousness be for the age to come. Taking the example of the ant, man, will you not strive for yourself, and store up in this life the rest of the age to come?"<sup>28</sup>

And also from a small being, the turtle dove, who, if separated from her mate, does not seek another life partner, women should take the example of virtue lived in widowhood<sup>29</sup>. Not only the ant, but also the fish teaches us to turn away from laziness and to be concerned about our future, not only in this life, but also in the life to come<sup>30</sup>. We can learn humility from the smallest and most inconsiderate of creatures, which still give things of great

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<sup>26</sup> P.G. 29, col. 189 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: II, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> P.G. 29, col. 193 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: III, p. 173.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> P.G. 29, col. 177 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: VI, p. 164.

<sup>30</sup> "The fishes go through so many and so many floods of waters, that they may find some use; but what canst thou say, who livest in idleness? That idleness is the beginning of evil-doing. Let no man blame ignorance! There is a natural law planted in us, which shows us to draw near to the good, and to turn away from those things which do us harm." (P.G. 29, col. 157 D; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, VII: V, p. 153.)

value. Such are in the depths of the sea the coral and the clam<sup>31</sup>. And from the bee we learn not only diligence, but also wisdom and great skill in the finer and more skilful craft of honeycombing and making honey and other health-giving<sup>32</sup> goods. From the cranes we may take the example of the orderliness of the flock and the service of the community<sup>33</sup>, from the storks the care of parents and elders<sup>34</sup>, from the crows the hospitality and care of their young<sup>35</sup>, from the swallow the skill of building a sturdy nest with ingenious craft and with simple and poor means, easily found in nature, which must strengthen our thoughts in poverty<sup>36</sup>. From dogs we take our example of friendship, gratitude for the benefits received and devotion<sup>37</sup>. And from everything we must strengthen our faith in God's care not only for all creation, but also for us, who are created in His image. Mentioning the seabird called the "alcyon", which gives birth to young in the middle of winter, in a short period when all the winds of the sea subside, allowing it to hatch and raise its young, Saint Basil draws for us an essential lesson that can be drawn from the contemplation of Creation:

"Well, let the care which God has ordained over the unliving things lead you to ask God for those to salvation! What wonder would not God do for you, who were made in His image, when, for so small a bird, He commands the wide and

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<sup>31</sup> P.G. 29, col. 161 A. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), VII: VI, p. 154. Also: "Find that the discoveries of geometry are a trifle to the too-wise bee." (P.G. 29, col. 173 D. *Hexaameron*, PSB 17, VIII: IV, p. 162.)

<sup>32</sup> P.G. 29, col. 173 C. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), VIII: IV, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup> P.G. 29, col. 176 A. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), VIII: V, pp. 162-163.

<sup>34</sup> P.G. 29, col. 176 B. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> P.G. 29, col. 180 A. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), VIII: VI, p. 164.

<sup>36</sup> P.G. 29, col. 176 D. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), VIII: V, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> P.G. 29, col. 198 C, D. *Hexaameron* (PSB 17), IX: IV, p. 175.

fearful sea to restrain and calm itself in the midst of winter?"<sup>38</sup>

From the rationalities of Creation we take good lessons for life, but we also have lessons or meanings for the faults we must guard against, such as, for example, the crab<sup>39</sup>'s cunning in eating or the camel's grudge<sup>40</sup> or "the cunning and deceitfulness of the octopus, which always takes the colour of the stone on which it sits"<sup>41</sup>. Creation becomes a kind of panorama from which we can learn, as from theatre, good or bad parables, or as a ground from which we can express and liken human behaviour and psychological<sup>42</sup> types, or as from a vast book of wisdom what is good to follow or to reject.

On the other hand, the unity between Scripture and Creation is seen not only in that both mirror divine ordinances and saving wisdom, having the same divine source, but also that you can understand each in its own meaning only in the light of the other. For example, the meanings (rationalities, λογος) planted in the creatures are interpreted by the teachings (meanings) of Scripture, as if they were complementary to each other. Thus Scripture can express the more spiritual meanings of the rationalities of creatures, such as the likeness of human nature,

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<sup>38</sup> P.G. 29, col. 177 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: V, p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> P.G. 29, col. 153 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VII: III, p. 150.

<sup>40</sup> P.G. 29, col. 165 C, D. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: I, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> P.G. 29, col. 153 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VII: III, p. 151.

<sup>42</sup> For example, the crab uses a cunning trick when hunting an oyster that is resting in places that are not windy, namely throwing a pebble between its two shells to prevent them from closing. And so he reaches the oyster's otherwise inaccessible flesh. "Knowing, however, that even in an animal there is much cunning and trickery, I wish to make you flee from imitating the wicked. [...] And I want you, who imitate the crab in the gathering of wealth and cunning to stop harming your fellow men!" (P.G. 29, col. 153 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), p. 150.)

so perishable in its bodily part, to the vanity of the flower, the parallel expressed by the prophet Isaiah:

"I want the wonder of Creation (τῆς κτίσεως τὸ θαῦμα) to remain in you even stronger, so that, wherever you are and near whatever kind of plant you find yourself, you will remember the Creator strongly. When you see a blade of green grass and a flower, let your mind go to human nature, remembering the image of the wise Isaiah, who said that 'all flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man like the flower of grass'."<sup>43</sup>

The rationalities (λογιοί) of Creation are the basis and the raw material for finding the expression of the higher meanings of spiritual realities, as Scripture does. The Lord Himself drew a parallel between Himself and the vine, using the natural reasoning imprinted on this plant to express meanings beyond the natural<sup>44</sup>. And the use of the meanings of Creation to express the meanings of the virtues and heavenly mysteries is used by the Saviour in all His parables. Which indicates that the rationality in the creatures can be stimulus and material for contemplation in those who have faith and have opened their minds to it.

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<sup>43</sup> P.G. 29, col. 97 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), V: II, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup> "It is enough for you to look at the vine - just to look at it skillfully - to remind you of your nature. You remember the Lord's comparison! The Lord called Himself the vine, the Father the worker, and those who are planted by faith in the Church, each one of us, He called branches; He calls us all to bring forth rich fruit, lest we, being condemned as unprofitable, be given to the fire. And Scripture does not hesitate to liken the souls of men everywhere to the vine: "The vine has become the beloved's vineyard in a fat place" (Isaiah 5:1); and "He has planted a vineyard and fenced it in" (Matthew 21:33). It is clear that he calls the souls of men 'vineyard', around which he has put a fence, that is, the security given by the commandments and the guardianship of the angels." (P.G. 29, 108 B, C; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, V: VI, pp. 125-126.)

Another parable from nature from which we can draw spiritual meaning: the amazing organic process of metamorphosis (which still gives serious trouble to the theory of evolution<sup>45</sup> today), such as the transformation of the Indian hornworm into a bumblebee or the caterpillar into a butterfly, is a testimony and a parable in favour of the possibility of the resurrection of bodies. For, indeed, the worm or caterpillar, hidden for a time in the chrysalis, melts its organs there until they become an indistinct liquid, and then appears in a totally different structure and appearance, as in a resurrection from the dead:

"...Remember the changes of this life and take the evident teaching about the resurrection and no longer doubt the change which Paul proclaims to us all."<sup>46</sup>

But the "unfathomable wisdom of God (τὴν ἀνεξιχνίαστον σοφίαν)"<sup>47</sup> can be seen not only in the content and order of the heavenly bodies, in the small and large creatures in the water, the sky and on land, but especially in the make-up of man, the most noble being, created "in the image" of God:

"The hardest thing of all seems to be to know oneself (ἐαυτὸν ἐπιγνῶναι)... He who examines himself with understanding (τόν γε συνετῶς ἐαυτὸν ἐξετάσαντα) can know God (τὸν Θεὸν ἔστιν ἐπιγνῶναι), not so much from the make-up of heaven and earth, as from the make-up of our own being (ἡ καὶ ἐκ τῆς οἰκείας ἡμῶν κατασκευῆς), as the prophet says: 'Wonderful is thy knowledge of me' (Ps. 138:5), in other words, knowing myself, I have known thy exceeding wisdom."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> On Darwinism's inexplicability of butterfly metamorphosis see more fully in the book *Does Evolutionism Have Scientific Proof?* by Ioan Bute.

<sup>46</sup> P.G. 29, col. 185 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: VIII, p. 168.

<sup>47</sup> P.G. 29, col. 201 C. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: V, p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> P.G. 29, col. 204 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: VI, p. 178.



And the words of Scripture "Take heed to yourself" (Deut. 15:9) do not mean, in St. Basil's interpretation, only an exhortation to awaken to cleanse oneself from sins and submit the body to reason. After all, the nature closest to our eyes and which can give us material for revelation and contemplation is human nature itself, our psycho-physical make-up, which is also the highest nature in Creation.

"Moreover, careful consideration and study of yourself will also lead you to the knowledge of God. If you take heed to yourself you no longer need to discover the Creator in other creatures; you will contemplate in yourself, as in a microcosm, the great wisdom of your Creator."<sup>49</sup>

From the order of the faculties of the soul and the functional fit of the organs of the body, you can know the wisdom of Him Who built you. Just as the soul has neither colour nor form and cannot be defined by a material characterisation, but is known to exist only from its effects, "from its functions", so also God is not to be understood by the eyes, but "by giving the mind faith, seek to have a spiritual understanding of Him"<sup>50</sup>.

But the spiritual benefit of contemplating nature does not lie in a thorough or broad (analytical or scientific) knowledge of nature, but in the spirit with which you approach it<sup>51</sup>. And in this knowledge and revelation of God's existence and mysteries through the contemplation of nature, it is not the extensive aspect of the spirit that prevails, but the *intensive* aspect, since wonder at the richness of God's wisdom can be aroused even by

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<sup>49</sup> Saint Basil the Great, *op. cit.* (PSB 17), *Homilies and Sermons, Homily III on the words "Take heed to thyself"*, pp. 373-374.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>51</sup> This is why Saint Maxim will insist on "natural contemplation *in the spirit*", which is something other than a simple and ordinary *spiritless* meditation on nature.

contemplating the smallest creature, such as the grain of wheat, so finely and appropriately architected in its components and relationships:

"A single blade of grass, a single plant is enough to make your mind (τὴν διάνοιάν) contemplate the skill (τέχνης) with which it was all done!"<sup>52</sup>

Besides, the small-minded man cannot even comprehend all the wisdom imprinted in the order and composition of Creation, nor would he have enough time for this vast research, but what remains in the soul of the one who contemplates nature with faith is the feeling of wonder in front of the divine wisdom and the desire to glory in God:

"What word will be satisfying, what hearing will be able to comprehend, what time will be enough to tell and recount all the wonders of the Great Master (τοῦ Τεχνίτου τὰ θαύματα)?

Let us also say with the prophet, "How great are your works, O Lord, all in wisdom have you done!" (Ps. 103:25)."<sup>53</sup>

Then he adds the conclusion which is consistent with the Pauline sentence in Rom. 1:18 ("that what could be known about God, God showed them, so that they might be without defence"):

"Therefore, we cannot defend ourselves sufficiently that we have not been taught from books what is useful to us, when the unwritten law of nature (ἀδιδάκτω τῆς φύσεως νόμῳ) teaches us to choose what is useful to us."<sup>54</sup>

And the fact that the revelation of God's existence and wisdom through nature is not only a matter of reason or reasoning, but also of the spirit, can be seen from the parallel between the "eyes of the owl" and "vain wisdom":

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<sup>52</sup> P.G. 29, col. 100 D, col. 101 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), V: V, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> P.G. 29, col. 196 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: III, p. 174.

<sup>54</sup> P.G. 29, col. 196 A, B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IX: III, p. 174.

"Consider that those who indulge in vain wisdom (τὴν ματαίαν σοφίαν) are like the eyes of the owl. That the eye of the owl is alive in the night, but dims in the light of the sun. So also the mind (ἡ διάνοια) of those is very keen when it searches the vain things (πρὸς τὴν τῆς ματαιότητος θεωρίαν) of this world, but is darkened when it comes to understanding the true light (πρὸς τὴν τῆς ματαιότητος θεωρίαν)."<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, since there are two kinds of light and two kinds of reality (spiritual and material, or: intelligible and sensible), there must also be two ways of looking at the world, one corporeal and the other spiritual. It is therefore clear that in faith there is not only analytical reason, but also the intuition of what is above nature and mirrored in nature, or of what is above reason but producing rationality.

It is a characteristic of the Eastern Fathers that they conceive of the value of the world not only as a gift for the material support of man, but also in its educational aspect, as a starting point in the ascent to the knowledge of God<sup>56</sup>. When they recall the harmony and beauty of the world as reflections of divine beauty, perceived by the mind of the contemplator of nature, the Holy Fathers have statements that seem to emphasize an aesthetic rather than an intellectual<sup>57</sup> dimension: "The beauty of what is seen will give us an idea of the One who is above all beauty."<sup>58</sup>

But just as natural contemplation goes beyond mere intellectual exercise, so too does the perception (or insight) of divine beauty from contemplation of the beauty of Creation go beyond mere

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<sup>55</sup> P.G. 29, col. 181 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VIII: VII, p. 166.

<sup>56</sup> Tomáš Špidlík S. J., *Spirituality of the Christian East. I. Systematic Handbook*, 2nd edition, translation and presentation by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2005, p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. P. Tomáš Špidlík S. J., *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>58</sup> P.G. 29, col. 28 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), I: XI, p. 83.

human aesthetic sense. "God saw that all things were beautiful (good: καλος)" (Genesis 1:10). But beauty here is intimately related to the wisdom put into Creation in an unspoken unity. (And, after all, are not beauty, harmony and wisdom one by reference to the same supreme Reason from whence they came? Is not the measure the primary instrument of right reason by which it achieves beauty, harmony and wisdom alike?) The divine "beauty" mirrored in Creation and mentioned (at Genesis 1:10) as contemplated by the Creator after the days of Creation is thus clarified by St. Basil:

"By these words, Scripture does not mean that God's works have pleased God's eyes (οὐχὶ ὀφθαλμοῖς Θεοῦ τέρψιν παρέχει), nor that God regards the beauty of creatures as we do; but beauty, in the sense given here by Scripture, is that which is perfectly made and serves well the purpose (τὴν τοῦ τέλους εὐχρηστίαν) for which it was made. God, therefore, having first set a definite purpose (τὸν σκοπὸν) for His creation, examined with His Creator's reasoning (τοῖς τεχνικοῖς ἑαυτοῦ λόγοις) those created, part by part (τὰ κατὰ μέρος γινόμενα), and praised them for fulfilling the purpose (ὡς συμπληρωτικὰ τοῦ τέλους) for which they were created."<sup>59</sup>

This act of contemplating His own creation by the Creator is similar to the gesture of the artist contemplating his work (as in the case of sculpture, the statue will not appear beautiful unless all the limbs and the parts are placed in their right place in the right measure and with the reasons and intentions planned by the artist). The artist "sees the beauty of each part (οἶδε τὸ ἐκάστου καλὸν) of his work before it is finished (πρὸ τῆς

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<sup>59</sup> P.G. 29, col. 76 D, col. 77 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), III: X, pp. 108-109.

συνθέσεως) and praises each part because it leads him to the end of his work (πρὸς τὸ τέλος αὐτῶν ἐπαναφέρων τὴν ἔννοιαν)."<sup>60</sup> Is worthy of emphasis St. Basil's statement about the convergence and intimate unity of beauty, harmony and wisdom reflected in Creation as reflections of divine thought, Who has placed in all universe rational order, proper measures and His purposes. Thus divine reason is the eternal basis for both the wisdom in Creation and its beauty and harmony. The rationality of Creation shows itself not only as order and wisdom from above, but also as beauty and harmony. Which means that just as in God there is unity between reason (or wisdom), beauty and harmony, their unity is also mirrored in the original Creation as a whole. Moreover, St. Basil himself defines "beauty" by "harmony"<sup>61</sup>, which is the unity of the parts through the Reason that unites them. And the "beauty" (καλός) contemplated by the Creator at the creation is one with the wisdom and reasoning put into Creation by Him: "For the Creator not with His eyes does see (βλέπει) the beauties of the creation, but looks (θεωρεῖ) at those made with His unspoken wisdom (τῆ ἀρρήτῳ σοφίᾳ)."<sup>62</sup> Also in this sense, interpreting the words of the Psalmist (from Ps. 44:4-5), St. Basil explains:

"... ,with Your beauty', in other words, with Your deity, which we contemplate and think about. That what is in reality beautiful is beyond all human understanding and power; therefore real beauty can only be contemplated with the mind."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> P.G. 29, col. 77 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), p. 109.

<sup>61</sup> PSB 17, *Homily on Psalm XLIV*, V, p. 291: "Beauty, however, is also harmony that flourishes in the way the members are made up and has grace in it."

<sup>62</sup> P.G. 29, col. 92 B. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), IV: VI, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup> PSB 17, *Homily on Psalm XLIV*, V, p. 291.

But contemplating divine beauty "with the mind" is not an act of the discursive intellect, but rather a spiritual insight and a gift from above. Beauty meets reason, both expressing harmony, but beauty, in itself, is an imponderable, an indefinable, beyond any objectification, beyond any effort to specify and measure of analytical reason.

For Saint Basil adds that the "beauty of God the Word" was known by the three holy apostles (Peter, James and John) in the radiance of the light on Christ's face on Mount Tabor, shining brighter than the light of the sun<sup>64</sup>. Thus, in keeping with the spiritual state and not the complexity of reasoning<sup>65</sup>, one's recognition of divine beauty as mirrored by the beauty of the world is achieved by the measure of one's partaking in the grace of Holy Spirit.

But if we can get an idea of the power, wisdom and beauty of the Creator by contemplating these attributes mirrored in His Creation, yet the divine attributes and the Maker Himself are so far above Creation that even the greatest creatures "in comparison with the Maker" "are like the mosquito and the ant".

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<sup>64</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>65</sup> Criticizing those who remain idolaters or believe in the eternity of matter, even though they are engaged in the sciences, Saint Basil thus interprets the Pauline word from Rom. 1:21-22 ("they have gone astray in their thoughts, and their unwise heart is darkened, and saying that they are wise, you have become fools"): "Indeed, the riches of the wisdom of the world will one day increase their dreadful doom, because they, being so occupied with vain things, have remained of their own accord blind to the understanding of the truth. [...] but one science of all they have not discovered, the knowledge of how to understand God, the Creator of the universe" (P.G. 29, col. 12 A, B; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, I: IV, p. 75.) To this "condemnation" the Saint Apostle Paul also alluded, pointing out the irreducible responsibility of men in the face of the objective character of natural revelation: "For what can be known about God, God has revealed to them, so that they may be without defence" (Rom. 1:18).

"That from none of the creatures can we acquire an idea worthy of the greatness of the God of the universe; they give us only small and faint images..."<sup>66</sup>

However, the benefit of contemplating nature is great for one who thinks things and meanings through to the last cause. Man, though of weaker physical strength than other living creatures, is ordained their ruler. He is inferior in bodily construction, but, through his "wealth of reason (τοῦ λόγου περιουσία), mighty to soar to heaven"<sup>67</sup>. Knowing, then, so much (spiritual and material) wealth that God has given us in this world, "gives us well-grounded confidence in the promised goodness (τὰ ἐν ἐπαγγελίαις πιστούμενον), and by living what is present convinces us of what we expect"<sup>68</sup>. Thus, the contemplation of nature strengthens our faith both in God's existence and in the "promised goodness" for the life to come. And in admiration and wonder at the Creator's care for his creation, the heart is lifted up in gratitude to him:

"If we know these things, we will know ourselves (ἐαυτοὺς ἐπιγνωσόμεθα), we will have knowledge of God (θεὸν γνωρίσομεν), we will worship the Creator (τὸν κτίσαντα προσκυνήσομεν), we will serve the Lord (τῷ Δεσπότη δουλεύσομεν), we will glorify the Father (τὸν Πατέρα δοξάσομεν), we will love our Nourisher (τὸν τροφέα ἡμῶν ἀγαπήσομεν), we will be devout to our Benefactor (τὸν εὐεργέτην αἰδεσθησόμεθα), we will not cease to worship the Beginner of our life (τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν) – and of this

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<sup>66</sup> P.G. 29, col. 145 C; *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VI: XI, p. 146. See also P.G. 29, col. 120 A, B; *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VI: I, p. 132.

<sup>67</sup> P.G. 29, col. 120 A. *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), VI: I, p. 132.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

one and the one to come (τῆς παρούσης καὶ τῆς μελλούσης)..."<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, the contemplation of nature in faith is an occasion to strengthen our gratitude to the Creator, but also to strengthen our hope in His words (present both in nature and in Scripture) and in His promises (emphasized in Scripture, but also foreshadowed by facts and symbols in nature). It is also a deepening into the mystery of Him, of the unknown One in His essence, but a luminous mystery, for it reveals to us the prospect of eternal happiness in divine light and love, for the world of the seen, with all its goodness, is an image and allusion to the much higher "promised goodness" of the world of the unseen:

"If the fleeting (τὰ πρόσκαιρα) are so, how shall the eternal (τὰ αἰώνια) be? If the seen (τὰ ὀρώμενα) are so beautiful (οὕτω καλὰ), how beautiful will the unseen (τὰ ἀόρατα) be? If the greatness of heaven (οὐρανοῦ μέγεθος) exceeds the measure (μέτρον) of the human mind (άνθρωπίνης διανοίας), what human mind (νοῦς) will discover the nature of the eternal? If the sun, which is subject to wickedness, is so beautiful and so great, if it is swift in motion and makes its revolutionary movements with regularity, if it has a magnitude (μὲν ἔχων τὸ μέγεθος) with just measure (σύμμετρον) in the universe (τῷ παντί), that it does not exceed (μὴ ἐκβαίνειν) the measure in respect to the whole universe (τὴν πρὸς τὸ ὅλον ἀναλογίαν), and in its beauty is like a shining eye as befits creation, if you cannot tire of looking at it, how bright in beauty (ποταπὸς τῷ κάλλει) must the Sun of justice (ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἥλιος) be?"<sup>70</sup>

According to Scripture, "the unseen things of God" are seen through the contemplation of creatures, and therefore also His

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<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem. P.G. 29, col. 120 B.



existence, for what could be known about Him, God revealed to men (Rom. 1:19-20). And he who does not believe in Him is "a fool" (Ps. 52:1 and Rom. 1:22) and without "a word of defense" (Rom. 1:19) and "holds unrighteousness as truth" (Rom. 1:18).

## Conclusions

This strong tone in favour of the objective character of natural revelation, present in Holy Scripture, was also adopted by the Cappadocian Fathers when they spoke of cosmic order or harmony as a witness to the existence of God and His attributes. Just as the Holy Apostles were "witnesses of the Resurrection", witnesses of the Word and preachers of His powers, so the wonder that there is cosmic order and harmony through laws, that hold the innumerable parts and opposing elements in unity, is visible through the interwoven rationalities in the universe, equally witnesses of the Word and preachers of His powers. But the revelation of God through nature presupposes a contemplation cleansed of pride, free of passion<sup>71</sup>, requesting an inclusive attitude, an integrative intuition of the universe, emphasizing the vision of the cosmic whole, not belittling either the astonishing greatness of the parts, thus not remaining at the level of the discursive paradigm of dissecting and fragmenting everything as if counting them as a sum of disparate objects. The emphasis falls on the sense of the fullness of the whole, on the

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<sup>71</sup> P.G. col. 4 A; *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), I: I, p. 71. And P.G. col. 11 A; *Hexaemeron* (PSB 17), I: III, p. 74. And *Hom. on Ps. 45* (PSB 17), III: "the Spirit writes thoughts in us" but "in proportion to the size of the heart". See also: "Should any of these things which have been said seem to you to be plausible, transfer your admiration to the wisdom of God which has ordered them so... If... not, still let the simplicity of faith be stronger than the deductions of reason." (P.G. col. 25 A; *Hexaemeron* (PSB), I: X.)

vision of the whole, of the pancosmic unity overwhelming to reason, on the miracle of the paradox of the world to contain in unspeakable harmony many "coincidentia oppositorum"<sup>72</sup>. And where there is miracle, there is also transcendence. So the sense of marvel at Creation, as a starting point in believing, has its logical and rational basis in the rationality and paradox of the world, without being reduced to mere (discursive) reason.

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<sup>72</sup> "When they have to explain the beauty of the universe in human terms, the Fathers gladly resort to the notion of beauty inherited from Stoicism: the harmony that gives unity to a being made up of multiple parts." (Špidlík, p. 146.) And the harmony of the universe made up of innumerable parts, many of which struggle with each other (fire and water, for example, or earth and air, cold and hot, lion and deer, etc.) without destroying the harmony of the whole, shows that it is a Creator who has made them wisely and takes care of them in detail. Thus St. Basil makes it clear that God "has united in unbounded friendship, in one unity and harmony, the whole world, made up of different parts". (P.G. col 33 A; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, II: II, p. 86.) Or: "And thus is made a circle and a harmonious horde, all in agreement and understanding with one another." (P.G. col. 92 A; *Hexaemeron*, PSB 17, IV: V, p. 116.)

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