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# THE FALL AND EVOLUTION IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY FROM MYTH TO SYMBOL

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## **Abstract**

When Christian theology is reconciled with scientific data on the origin of man, the following questions arise: if man appeared about 100 thousand years ago, can he be responsible for death and suffering of previously living beings in the struggle for the existence? If death, suffering and predation have already been, what is fundamentally new added by the fall of man? We discuss several theological approaches to these questions: Teilhard de Chardin's attempt to eliminate them by a complete rejection of the biblical myth; answers of modern theologians offering non-traditional interpretations of the biblical myth; the answer of Tillich, who understands the Fall as a symbol of the universal human situation. If one distracts from the chronology of these answers, then the logic of the development of theological thought can be described as a transition from a mythological understanding of the Fall to a symbolic one.

**Keywords:** biological, evolution, theodicy, origin, evil

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## **1. Introduction - the problem of reconciling Christian theology with scientific data on the origin of man**

When we consider the possibility of reconciling scientific ideas about biological evolution with the Christian doctrine of the Fall, we do not mean reconciling with the literally understood text of the first three chapters of the Genesis. Early in third century, Origen had already rejected a literal understanding of the Bible (i.e. the impossibility that plants were created before the Sun and stars, Genesis 1.11-16). In Europe, the problem of literalism in the understanding of the Bible was widely discussed in the last century in connection with Rudolf Bultman's famous program of the 'demythologization of Christianity' [1]. Bultman assumed that the modern educated man cannot sincerely believe that the world was created in a ready-made form six and a half thousand years ago. He believed that the biblical myths, particularly those that relate to events of great antiquity, have a religious rather than historical

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meaning, which we must understand and express in modern language. However, during the discussion, a significant amendment was made to Bultman's program. Myths and symbols are images from our visible world, through which the higher reality, which lies beyond our sight and our understanding, reveals something about itself and about us in a language that is accessible to us. Therefore, religion can talk about God and ultimate things (for example, the creation of the world and the end of history) only in the language of myths and symbols. But about how these ultimate things relate to the real world, must be spoken in a language that reflects modern concepts of the world. And since these concepts differ very significantly from those of ancient times, a departure from the literal understanding of the Bible is inevitable. According to Paul Tillich, one of Bultman's opponents in this matter, if the demythologization of the Bible is possible only up to a certain limit, then it is possible and necessary to talk about its 'deliteralization' [2].

What is the religious meaning of the biblical story of the Fall?

First, this story solves the problem of theodicy: how to reconcile the goodness and omnipotence of God with the existence of evil, death and suffering in the world created by Him? Traditional ('classical') theology gives the following answer. In the original world created by God, there was no evil, death, and suffering. However, man who has been given free will by God has made a wrong use of his freedom, violating the prohibition established by God. This led to a global catastrophe: the first people, Adam and Eve, were expelled from Paradise, fell away from God, and with them the whole world passed into a fallen state or, in modern language, descended to a lower ontological level. Second, this story describes the situation of man in the fallen world as living in a state of 'original sin' inherited from Adam, from which man cannot escape on his own.

The problem is that it is not so easy to separate the religious meaning of this story from its mythological shell *a priori*. For example, is the story of Adam and Eve a myth or a story about real events in time and space? In traditional Christian theology, these events are treated as real. If we do not agree with this, we must, first, give a compelling argument, and secondly, explain whether, considering Adam and Eve mythical personages, it is possible to preserve the religious meaning of the story.

However, the rejection of the myth of Adam and Eve as the progenitors of humanity does not seem to significantly damage the religious meaning of the biblical narrative: we can assume that these are collective images representing the original human population. The following questions are much more significant.

1. If man appeared about 100 thousand years ago, can he be responsible for the death, suffering and mutual destruction in the struggle for the existence of millions of previously living creatures? It turns out that evil existed before the appearance of man, and he appeared in a fallen world?
2. If death, suffering, and predation already existed, what did the fall of man add that was fundamentally new? Can it be considered a global catastrophe?

In the following sections of the article, we will consider the scientific data on the origin of man and the ways proposed by modern theologians to reconcile these data with classic Christian teaching about the Fall. We will also consider the earlier and more radical approach of Teilhard de Chardin, who proposed to eliminate the questions posed by Science by rejecting the idea of the Fall as such.

## **2. Scientific data on the origin of man**

A summary of these data can be found, for example, in [3]. The place where the transition from primates to humans can best be traced in the sequence of fossils is the Great Rift Valley in north-eastern Africa (present-day Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania). There are unique geological conditions both for the preservation of fossils and for determining their age from the layers of volcanic eruptions. It is established, for example, that *Australopithecus* appeared about 3.6 million years ago. We can trace the development of the skeleton: 200 thousand years ago, it became indistinguishable from our own, i.e. *Homo sapiens* appeared. Simultaneously with *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals appeared in various places in Europe and Western Asia. They were able to hunt, and they had stone tools, but these tools did not change for 150 thousand years (there was no creative development). Neanderthals disappeared about 40 thousand years ago after the appearance of *Homo sapiens* in their places of residence, and many think that this is not accidental.

Recently, our knowledge about the origin of man has significantly expanded thanks to genetic studies. A qualitative leap occurred at the beginning of our century, when the genomes of humans and great apes were decoded, and a technique for restoring the genomes of fossils (in which the necessary biological material was preserved) was developed. The human genome includes 21 thousand genes that set the program of the human body structure. Each gene is a chain of four types of molecular components (nucleotides) arranged in a certain order. Thanks to the decoding of genomes, it was possible to trace the dynamics of populations development. Genes mutate, and the rate of their mutation can be estimated according to palaeontology data (in Palaeontology the dating of remains is carried out by radiometric methods). Knowing this rate, one can show, for example, that a small difference in the genomes of chimpanzees and humans indicates their origin from a common ancestor who lived 8 million years ago. It is possible to estimate changes in the population size of a particular species over time.

The gene data matches well with the fossil data. Geneticists have calculated that between 70 and 50 thousand years ago, a ‘bottleneck’ formed in the development of the *Homo sapiens* population, and all of today’s people whose traceable ancestors are not Africans descended from several thousand people who left Africa during this time.

Throughout their early history, our ancestors lived in Africa. However, something happened to the population about 100 thousand years ago. Archaeology shows that at this time *Homo sapiens* developed 'symbolic' (abstract) thinking, which dramatically increased creative abilities. Some researchers believe that this creativity was due to the emergence of language, others believe it was due to understanding that others also have independent thinking. Anyway, the evolutionary 'Big Bang' occurred about 100 thousand years ago, when most people (if not all of them) lived in Africa.

Genetic studies have once again confirmed and clarified what was already known to palaeontologists: humans, like all living beings, arose not as an individual, but as a species. In other words, the emergence of new species occurred by isolating populations, after which interbreeding between representatives of the two isolated populations stops. According to recent estimates, the dividing of chimpanzee and human populations ended in the time interval from 4 to 6 million years ago, with the process itself lasting for more than a million years. Humans are social beings; they become human by interacting with other humans. The dimension of the spirit (absent in animals) manifests itself in human culture, religion and morality. This means that it could only occur in the protracted process of communication between people. In recent decades, this has been confirmed by genetic calculations. According to these calculations, the population size in Africa has never been less than 10 thousand people. Therefore, the origin of all people from one pair of progenitors contradicts scientific data.

For the theological interpretation of scientific data, one more circumstance must be noted. In recent decades, scientists have come to understand that the survival of humanity is a miracle, an incredible accident, and natural selection itself could not lead to this. Natural and geological disasters, such as the division of continents, dramatically disrupted the natural course of biological evolution. For example, mammals replaced the dinosaurs because of a space disaster: the collision of a huge asteroid with the Earth. Along with that, apes in the Old World and New World live about 40 million years and remain apes. Madagascar separated from Africa 150 million years ago. There were lemurs - primates with whom we share a common ancestor. But in all this time, only new species of lemurs have appeared. And in general, the number of species that have survived in the course of evolution is many times less than the number of extinct ones. Of course, this data does not prove anything, but nevertheless suggests the existence of Divine Providence.

Despite this reservation, scientific evidence about the origin of man through biological evolution makes it impossible to literally understand the biblical story of the Fall. This undermines the doctrine of the nature and origin of evil dominated in Christian theology. A radical solution to the problems that arose in this regard was proposed in the middle of the twentieth century by the famous palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard proposed to completely abandon the myth of the Fall and consider evil as an inevitable consequence of the process of evolution, even if this process takes place in

accordance with the divine plan. It must be said that the British theologian F.R. Tennant (1866-1957) came up with the idea of theistic evolution without the Fall half a century before Teilhard. However, at that time his works did not attract widespread attention and were read again only at the beginning of this century.

### **3. Theistic evolution without the Fall (Teilhard de Chardin and F.R. Kennant)**

According to the Teilhardian concept, evolution is a purposeful process of complication and creative unification, culminating in humans: the sphere of reflexive human consciousness (noosphere) goes beyond the biosphere of animals. Evolution is conducted and guided by Christ, who has not only a divine and human, but also a cosmic nature [4].

The worldwide Christ is the organic centre of the Universe, i.e. the centre on which all-natural development ultimately depends physically. At the same time, Christ is the 'Omega point' to which Evolution is directed and at which it ends. "The presence of the Incarnate Word penetrates everything, as a universal element. It shines at the common heart of things, as a centre that is infinitely intimate to them and at the same time (since it coincides with universal fulfilment) infinitely distant." [4, p. 57]

Teilhard does not attach much importance to the question of the origin of evil. The main thing is that evil is multiplicity, separation and disintegration. Therefore, it does not matter which hypothesis to accept: "that Evil pluralised the world as a consequence of a culpable act - or that the world (because it is plural, evolutionary) produced Evil, at the very first instant, as an object produces its shadow" [4, p. 80]. Obviously, the remark about the possibility of 'a culpable act' is a formal concession to traditional theology: it is unclear who could have committed such an act at the initial moment of complete disintegration.

The rejection of the idea of the Fall and the global catastrophe associated with it is the main difference between Teilhard's concept and traditional theology. The second, no less important difference follows from it: Teilhard offers another (different from the traditional) idea of the nature of evil and of human guilt. Physical and moral evil is the result of the process of becoming. Everything that develops experiences physical suffering and moral failure. Therefore, the cross of Christ is not a symbol of redemption, but a symbol of the pain and toil of evolution.

Moral suffering results from the misuse of our freedom. Moral evil is our refusal to go to the Omega point in the process of Evolution, which means that it arises through human guilt. However, it is ultimately overcome by the saving power of the cross of Christ. The completion and full realization of creation in the final synthesis at the Omega point is a difficult task. And at the last stage of evolution, at the level of the noosphere, it becomes so difficult that it requires the incarnation of the Word and death on the cross. Attributing to Christ, in addition to the divine and human, also the cosmic nature, Teilhard essentially

offers a new Christology: Christ not only saves humanity, but also carries out, from beginning to end, the entire process of Evolution.

Teilhard recognizes the existence of evil in the world created by God. Thus, it is not man who is responsible for the existence of evil in the world, but God Himself. But this evil is not terrible at all, it's just the unavoidable costs of the development process. Consequently, it is fully redeemed by the greatness of the ultimate goal. Since it is man who is the culmination of evolutionary development and plays the main role at the last stage of Evolution, then everything that precedes man has the character of a preparatory process. Therefore, animals and millions of years of merciless struggle for existence can be discounted. This is how Teilhard solves the problem of theodicy.

Summing up, we can say that Teilhard offers an alternative version of Christianity, which solves unresolved issues in traditional theology related to the Fall. Teilhard was heavily criticized for his departure from traditional theology. But there are other serious objections to his concept, the meaning of which is that by solving some problems, he creates others, no less serious.

Firstly, by defining evil as the inevitable costs of the process of becoming, Teilhard clearly downplays the real power and moral intolerance of evil. According to Teilhard, a person with a developed reflexive consciousness is not afraid of evil. We can overcome physical suffering if we treat it correctly. Then suffering can become an effective means of victory over yourself, self-liberation. And death, which by its nature is emptiness and a return to multiplicity, can become fullness and unity in God in every human life. But such an understatement of the power of evil and suffering does not seem realistic. The world is full of innocent suffering, in which it is impossible to see any meaning. We immediately recall Ivan Karamazov's famous conversation with Alyosha about the suffering of innocent children and Dostoevsky's thought that no future harmony can 'cancel' these sufferings. And the memory of them makes the happiness of hypothetical generations of the 'last times' impossible. Further, Teilhard does not explain the reasons for such a stubborn refusal of man to go to the 'Omega point' and that this persistence only increases in the process of evolution (to such an extent that to overcome it, God is forced to become human and die on the cross).

In Teilhard's new Christology, Christ, in addition to the divine and human, also has a cosmic nature. The centuries-old history of theological disputes over the Chalcedonian definition, as well as the New Testament studies of the last two centuries have shown that even the traditional idea of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ needs serious rethinking [5]. The addition of Teilhard's cosmic nature of Christ significantly complicates the task. But if, in relation to traditional Christology, the ideas of such a rethinking exist (here we can point to two grandiose theological systems, by Karl Barth and by Paul Tillich, created in the middle of the twentieth century), then in relation to Teilhard's Christology, these problems not only have not been resolved, but have not even been raised.

It is also impossible not to say that in the second half of the twentieth century, after Teilhard, the picture of biological evolution was significantly supplemented. The data obtained in recent decades show that Evolution was by no means such a systematic and steady progressive development in the direction of differentiation and complication, as it seemed to Teilhard, but was largely chaotic and even catastrophic, without teleology or determinism.

These shortcomings of Teilhard's concept do not allow us to see in it a satisfactory answer to the problems of traditional theology associated with the Fall. Rather, it should be seen as a challenge to traditional theology, requiring new, non-traditional theological solutions.

However, Teilhard's idea that the theory of biological evolution could be integrated into the Christian worldview gradually became more and more popular. And at the beginning of this century, theologians remembered F.R. Tennant, whose thoughts turned out to be very relevant. The main role here was played by the works of D.K. Brannan [6, 7], which contain a detailed account of Tennant's lectures at Cambridge (1902) and of his subsequent critical analysis of theological views at the Fall and original sin. Tennant comes to the conclusion that original sin is better viewed as an inherited natural tendency to self-survival, rather than as inherited guilt. In his comments, Brannan, in one place, calls this view of the Fall the view of modern human biology and in another place, of modern anthropology. In fact, it is about a scientific version of the Christian doctrine of sin. Hereinafter, for brevity, we will call it Christian science.

Christian science agrees with Teilhard that Christian theology can dispense with the myth of the Fall. But it does not share Teilhard's idea of the cosmic Christ guiding the evolution of the world and man to the Omega point, and replaces it with a simpler idea of 'natural evolution', originally part of the divine plan.

The sinful nature of man did not arise as a result of the Fall: in fact, this is the nature of the original human population, which, like all living things, sought self-survival and reproduction. Such selfish propensities are inherent in every individual. But he can only satisfy them in a group. There is always some tension between the interests of the individual and the interests of the group. At some stage of evolution, the group establishes laws or norms of behaviour that ensure its survival. And an individual whose natural propensities do not fit into these norms begins to realize them as sinful. Thus, natural propensities are not sinful in themselves. "However, those same behaviours, once convicted by the law of living within a larger group, are what we call sin which includes the guilt we experience for fear of being discovered." [7, p. 169]

The advantage of this understanding of sin is that it is much easier to reconcile it with traditional ideas of salvation than Teilhard's theology. God, realizing that we cannot overcome our natural inclinations by ourselves, intervenes in the process of Evolution and sends Christ. Christ overcomes sin by his death on the cross. This statement is consistent with a wide variety of forms of religiosity. For example, in Christ we can see an example that "even in fleshly form we can overcome our natural sense of self-survival" [7, p. 168], and this

gives us the strength to work on ourselves. And although Christian science understands the nature and origin of sin differently than traditional Christian theology, the proclamation of Christ's victory over sin brings it closer to the Catholic, Orthodox or any other Church tradition.

Unfortunately, this excellent theory also has weaknesses. Indeed, sin and guilt are inseparably linked. Christian science claims that guilt, and therefore sin, arose naturally in the course of Evolution. But this is more declared than explained. The norms imposed on an individual by a group or society can only cause him more or less displeasure, depending on how reasonable they are in his mind. He will comply with them for reasons of expediency and under threat of punishment. But violating norms imposed from the outside will never lead to feelings of guilt. This feeling can only arise when we violate the norms that we have set for ourselves. Perhaps here we come closest to the mystery that lies behind the myth of the Fall. Why does a person not only accept the restrictions set by society, but also imposes much stronger restrictions on himself, which society does not need and often even hinders? Christian science leads to this question, but does not answer it. Below we will see how this problem is solved in Tillich's theology.

And besides, Christian science has the same drawback as Teilhard's theology: the idea of a kind and wise God who put man's animal instincts at the service of Evolution in order to overcome them later with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross cannot be reconciled with the innocent and senseless sufferings overflowing the world, sufferings that no future harmony can justify.

#### **4. Modern concepts of theistic evolution (theology of reconciliation)**

It should be noted that despite the huge contribution of genetic studies to our understanding of human origins, from the point of view of Theology, the results obtained by geneticists did not bring something fundamentally new. Although there were no exact time estimates 50-70 years ago, the relatively recent appearance of humans on Earth and the fact that humanity arose not from two individuals, but developed from a population, was already known by the middle of the twentieth century [8]. And Genetics does not explain the jumps in the evolutionary process. The gigantic difference between humans and chimpanzees (even in walking upright, not to mention language, thinking and morality) has not yet been linked to specific differences in their genomes.

Nevertheless, genetic studies have had a noticeable impact on modern theology. Previously, many Christians did not trust palaeontologists too much and hoped that their conclusions could be challenged or, at least, interpreted differently. The results of the geneticists convinced them that the scholars were right. And some of these Christians, who would never have thought of making changes to the Theology of traditional denominations, accepted the challenge of Science and began to propose various ways for formally reconciling scientific data on the origin of man with the biblical text. Considering Evolution as a method of creation chosen by God, they at the same time sought to avoid the



radical conclusions by Teilhard de Chardin, i.e. somehow preserve the traditional doctrine of the Fall. As a result, a whole trend emerged in Christian theology that could be called ‘theology of reconciliation’. Next, we will consider the main concepts of this theology.

#### **4.1. Concepts of Orthodox authors**

##### *4.1.1. Theistic evolution with the Fall*

Evolution (the Big Bang, the emergence of stars and planets, the emergence of life on Earth, biological evolution) is God’s chosen method of Creation. The first chapters of Genesis reflect this process of creation only in the most general terms. Since evolution, according to scientific evidence, was very slow, the “days of Creation referred to in the first chapter of Genesis are not astronomical days but should be interpreted as time intervals of indeterminate (and possibly varying) duration” [A.V. Gomankov, *How to describe the history of the world?*, <http://megatherium.diary.ru/p127390412.htm?from=0>].

The process of Evolution, generally slow and gradual, does not exclude leaps. Such a leap, which is naturally interpreted as a direct divine intervention, took place at the emergence of man. This leap is described in different ways, but the essence of it is that God took a certain anthropoid being, re-created the body of this creation into a human body capable of accommodating the human soul, and then filled it with the breath of life.

How is the problem of theodicy solved in the concept of theological evolution?

Unlike Teilhard de Chardin, the proponents of this concept see a certain problem in the suffering of animals in the process of evolution (before the appearance of humans). Nevertheless, they actually join Teilhard, arguing that death and predation, which existed before the appearance of man, is not evil, but a natural phenomenon that caused the change of generations and thereby the process of development. It cannot be considered as a manifestation of the imperfection of the world created by God. But the evil is not only and not so much that everything that is born must die. It is that all living things want to live, but some of them have to kill others to maintain their life. This tragedy of natural life was deeply felt by Nikolai Zabolotsky, the famous Russian poet [9]: “The beetle ate grass, the beetle was pecked by a bird, / The ferret was drinking the brain out of a bird’s head. / And fear distorted faces / Of night creatures looked out of the grass.”

This is evil in its purest form. But maybe it’s only the sentimentality of a poet? There are people who have never had companion animals and who do not know that animals differ from us only in that they cannot speak clearly and think abstractly. There are people for whom animals are of no interest or importance - at least, far less important than the certainty of their denomination infallibility. For such people, the concept of theistic evolution in this part - that there was no evil before the appearance of man - is quite acceptable.

According to the concept of theistic evolution, the catastrophe of the Fall is connected with the fact that the first people were immortal. "This immortality was thus one of the aspects that distinguished man from all other creatures." [<http://megatherium.diary.ru/p127390412.htm?from=0>] The disastrous consequence of the Fall was that man lost the immortality that he originally possessed. Therefore, this is a catastrophe only for the human world, everything else remains as it was. However, the idea of our *entire world* as fallen is deeply rooted in Christianity. To refute this, A.V. Gomankov claims that the apostle Paul, who wrote "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin" (Romans 5.12), in fact (if we take into account the context) meant only the human world [<http://megatherium.diary.ru/p127390412.htm?from=0>].

But is the loss of immortality by the first people really a catastrophe? If immortality is understood as the infinite duration of a human life in the mortal world, this is a very doubtful good! One immediately remembers Hegel called the infinite duration the 'bad infinity'. In Christianity, eternity is understood as the overcoming of time and space, but not as an infinite duration in time.

Thus, as far as the problem of theodicy is concerned, one can agree or disagree with the concept of theistic evolution, it depends on the subjective attitude of the believer. However, the explanation of the Fall as a global catastrophe in this concept is clearly unsatisfactory.

#### 4.1.2. *Evolution as a consequence of the Fall*

If the ideas of theistic evolution arose and were developed not only in Orthodoxy, but also in other Christian denominations, then the range of ideas discussed below is present only in Orthodox theology. The beginning of this course of thought was laid by bishop Vasily (Rodzyanko) [10]. His idea is that the natural history of the world that modern science insists on (the Big Bang with subsequent evolution) begins not with the moment of Creation, but with the moment of the Fall. Everything that is said in the first three chapters of Genesis - the world before the Fall - took place not on Earth, but in some other dimension. It is about a different plane of being, a different world that preceded the earthly world and in which other laws of Nature operated. Accordingly, A.V. Gomankov proposed to call this direction of theological thought *alterism*.

It is clear that for the Science, which studies our fallen world, the world that was before the Fall, is not available. Nevertheless, the question arises: what relation do Adam and Eve (or the original humanity that they symbolically represent), as well as animals and plants that existed before the Fall, have to the present people, animals and plants? If God, after the Fall, decided to start all over with a clean slate, i.e. with the Big Bang, then, obviously, none. Naturally, supporters of alterism cannot agree with this. "It would be wrong to think that the world created by God disappeared, collapsed, and the animals and all other creatures had to arise 'again' after many billions of years... Rather, it makes sense to talk about two parallel states of the same reality... Time flows absolutely differently here and *there*." [11]

An attempt to concretize this idea is made by N.S. Serebryakov [12]. Since everything was qualitatively different before the Fall, “we have no reason to disbelieve the biblical account of what the world was like before the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. In particular, the fact that in it simultaneously lived all kinds of animals, reconstructed by scientists from the paleontological chronicle. Moreover, both man and these animals were designed so that they did not eat each other and did not die.” But how did this simultaneous existence of imperishable beings become, as a result of the Fall, a million-year history of successive species? The transformation was due to the fact that with the Fall, not only the quality of the creature changed (it became perishable), but also time itself changed. Millions of years of ‘fallen’ time, during which, according to Science, biological evolution took place, “passed in that brief moment of primordial time when, after the curse of the Earth, the first people... were driven out of Paradise”. Then the appearance (from the scientific point of view) of each new species of creature corresponds to the moment of transition of this species from an imperishable state to a perishable one.

The disadvantage of this concept is that the assumption that in the previous world, everything was like our world, only people and animals did not die, and time flowed billions of times faster (or, in another version of *alterism*, it was in principle incomparable with our own) - this is just an unfounded speculation. The degree of its fantasy becomes clear if you ask a simple question: how was time determined in the previous world? Was the Earth orbiting the Sun billions of times faster? And the goal that their authors pursue - to preserve the possibility of a literal understanding of the first chapters of the Genesis - is still not achieved: Serebryakov himself admits that his concept does not solve the issue of reconciling scientific estimates of the age of mankind with the biblical pedigrees [12].

#### ***4.2. Concepts of Catholic and Protestant authors***

We have seen that Orthodox authors strive either to preserve the literal meaning of the biblical narrative, or to show that the later appearance of man on Earth does not contradict traditional ideas about the goodness of God and about the Fall as a global catastrophe. They do not question the origin of the human race from one pair of progenitors yet. In contrast, Catholic and Protestant authors for the most part do not doubt that man arose as a species, i.e. the original human population numbered thousands of people. (Of the 69 authors of articles and books on the Fall published from 2005 to 2014, only 28 consider Adam and Eve to be the progenitors of mankind [[https://cdn.ymaws.com/network.asa3.org/resource/dynamic/forums/0150829\\_143039\\_10526.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/network.asa3.org/resource/dynamic/forums/0150829_143039_10526.pdf)].) But it is possible to talk about sin only if man besides instincts has a consciousness of moral responsibility and an idea of the law. Therefore, Adam and Eve are a couple (or a certain community of people) that God at some point chose from the human population and endowed with reasonable consciousness, righteousness

and free will. It was these people who violated the divine prohibition. How did their sin spread to the rest of the people and to subsequent generations?

In Catholic and Protestant theology of reconciliation there are quite a lot of answers to these questions [13]. According to one of them, the chosen couple lost their righteousness after the Fall, but did not lose their rational consciousness. They became the progenitors of the ‘theological species’: their descendants, as well as the next generations born as a result of interbreeding their descendants with other members of the population, also possessed rational consciousness. And since rational consciousness gave an advantage in natural selection, and since the population at that time still had a small number, it spread to the entire population over several centuries. The original sin, like the rational consciousness, also spread naturally [14].

In the second version, as in the first, Adam and Eve are real people chosen by God from the entire human population. But unlike the first variant, this choice was made by God in the Neolithic era, when people already had a reasonable consciousness. And since at that time the population numbered several million, sin could no longer spread naturally, and God spread it to all people ‘laterally’, i.e. he simply transferred it to them by his will [15].

In the third version, the Fall was not personal, but social in nature and consisted in the destruction of the original harmony in the social group [16]. The assumption of Cardinal J. Ratzinger according to which original sin is damage to relationships between people is close to this [17].

In the fourth version, the human population that emerged in Africa gradually came to understand the existence of God and to worship Him. However, later (presumably in the Neolithic era), people turned away from God to live by their own will. Thus, the biblical narrative of the Fall is a retelling of the initial period of human history in the language of the Hebrew culture in the context of the culture of the Middle East. In reality, the Fall is a long historical process leading to spiritual death [18]. In this version, the myth is modified even more: Adam and Eve disappear from it, and the event of the Fall is not only transferred to the Neolithic era, but also stretched over time.

Even this far from complete list shows that Catholic and Protestant authors go further than Orthodox in the direction of the demythologization of Fall: their modifications of the traditional myth of Adam and Eve do not contradict either the fact of the relatively recent appearance of man on Earth or his origin as a species. However, although these modifications look more plausible than the traditional myth, none of them seems quite satisfactory. This is especially true of the original sin transfer: since a single violation of God’s will cannot be inherited biologically, God must somehow participate in this process. And in the fourth version, God is responsible for the very event of the Fall: having endowed man with free will, he did not endow him with the ability to resist temptations. (However, the same reproach can be presented to the biblical myth.)

## **5. The Fall as a symbol of the universal human situation (Tillich)**

In the opinion of Tillich, the Fall is a symbol which “is a decisive part of the Christian tradition” [2, p. 29]. In the language of mythology, the Fall is described as a unique event that happened to the first people (Adam and Eve) in the distant past. According to Tillich, the Fall is an initial fact, a universal quality of human existence, it ontologically precedes everything that happens to man in time and space. In other words, the Fall is a symbol of the universal human situation.

Tillich describes the Fall in terms of ‘essence-existence’. These terms have been widely used in classical theology throughout its history, but in Tillich’s theology they are not used in the traditional sense. Tillich understands by essence not *what* makes a thing what it is, not its ‘nature’, but its ‘inherence purpose’, norm, what this thing ‘should be’. Essence in this sense is opposed not by hypostasis (as in classical theology), but by ‘existence’: what a thing is in fact, i.e. something less than it could be due to its essential nature. Unlike Plato’s ‘ideas’, Tillich’s essence is not yet a full-fledged being, although it is no longer nothing. The essence receives full-fledged being only in existence, although it is realized in an incomplete, distorted form. But it is real from the very beginning in the sense that it sets a norm for existence, determines its potential and ‘judges’ it from the point of view of its norm.

According to Tillich, man in his essence is, although finite, endowed with freedom and maintaining a connection with God being. However, its potential has not yet been realized. The Fall is a man’s renunciation of his essence for the sake of realizing himself in existence. But in existence, man is estranged from God and from one’s own essence.

In the language of Psychology, the state of humans before the Fall can be described as ‘dreaming innocence’. This phrase indicates something that has potentiality, but not reality. Orthodox theologians have heaped perfection after perfection upon Adam before the Fall, making him equal with the picture of Christ. This procedure is not only absurd; it makes the Fall completely unintelligible. Mere potentiality or dreaming innocence is not perfection. Only the conscious union of existence and essence is perfection, as God is perfect because he transcends essence and existence [2, p. 34].

To get out of the state of dreaming innocence, man is brought by the anxiety associated with the awareness of his finite freedom. This is the anxiety of losing himself without realizing his potential, which is perceived as a temptation. Man makes a decision to give up dreaming innocence, but this decision is not only an act of individual freedom, but also a consequence of the universal destiny.

According to Tillich, man’s finiteness is expressed not only in the fact that the time of his life is finite. His freedom is also finite - in the sense that it is limited by fate. The idea that man’s freedom is limited introduces something new into the traditional idea of the Fall. The biblical story of the Fall is dominated by the ethical element of Adam’s guilt. But in the background of the

biblical narrative elements of cosmic myth are visible: the struggle of God with demonic forces and with the forces of chaos and darkness; the myth of the fall of angels; interpretation of the serpent of Eden as an incarnation of a fallen angel. In this myth, the Fall looks like a cosmic event in which a man cannot avoid participating.

Two biblical myths symbolically reflect two aspects of human existence: ethical freedom and tragic destiny. The Fall is not only ethical, but also tragic: in submitting to destiny, man endowed with finite freedom experiences this submission as his own fault. Theology must develop “a realistic doctrine of man, in which the ethical and the tragic elements in his self-estrangement are balanced. It may well be that such a task demands the definite removal from the theological vocabulary of terms like ‘original sin’ or ‘hereditary sin’ and their replacement by a description of the interpenetration of the moral and the tragic elements in the human situation” [2, p. 39].

But if the freedom of man is included in the destiny of the world, the question arises, does the idea of the Fall refer only to man, or does the world also participate in the Fall? ‘Whether it is not less confusing’, Tillich asks rhetorically, “to drop concept of the fallen world and to distinguish radically between man and Nature. Is it not more realistic to state that man alone is able to become guilty, because he is able to make responsible decisions and that nature is innocent?” [2, p. 41]. Tillich, however, rejects this solution as too simple. If the basis of sin were only responsible decisions of the individual, then the element of universal destiny would be excluded, and each individual would have the opportunity not to contradict his essence and not to sin. In the early Church, Pelagius insisted on this possibility, but Pelagianism and even its more moderate versions (which arose in the Middle Ages and Modern times) were rejected by all leading Christian theologians.

In our time, the recognition that there is an element of universal destiny in the Fall is reinforced by modern knowledge of man and his connection with Nature. It is impossible to say at what point in biological evolution animal nature was replaced by human nature; at what point in the development of the human individual responsibility begins and ends; the conscious decisions of man are greatly influenced by the domain of the unconscious, and so on. Along with that, in nature, too, we can see analogues of human freedom (spontaneity) and human behaviour, described in terms of good and evil. Therefore, the concept of existence, according to Tillich, can be applied not only to man, but also to the world in which he lives.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that the existence of man “is that existence in which man finds himself along with the whole Universe, and there is no time in which this was otherwise” [2, p. 41]. So ‘Adam before the Fall’ and ‘nature before the curse’ are man and Nature on their essential levels, but not really existing states. In other words, Creation and the Fall coincide - not in time, they are events outside of time - but in the sense that there is no such moment *in* time when man and Nature have changed from good to evil.

Although the concepts of 'estrangement' and 'sin' generally speaking are similar, since they express a man's falling away from God, they are not interchangeable. Sin expresses most sharply the personal character of estrangement over against its tragic side. It expresses personal freedom and guilt in contrast to tragic guilt and the universal destiny of estrangement. The word 'sin' "has a sharpness which accusingly points to the element of personal responsibility in one's estrangement" [2, p. 46].

This understanding of the nature of sin solves the problem that Christian science has stopped before. Why does a person set moral norms for himself that may be higher than the norms established by society? Because even in a state of estrangement, moral norms remind him of his true essence, that he is not what he should be.

The transformation of the finitude in conditions of estrangement aggravates evil and suffering. According to Tillich, the doctrine of immortality as a natural quality of man is not a Christian doctrine. The Bible says that man is mortal by nature. "According to the Genesis account, man comes from the dust and returns to the dust. He has immortality only as long as he is allowed to eat of the tree of life - the tree which carries the divine food or the food of eternal life. The symbolism is obvious. Participation in the eternal makes man eternal; separation from the eternal leaves man in his natural finitude." [2, p. 67] In estrangement, man is completely determined by his finite nature, i.e. the inevitability of dying. Sin does not produce death, but it gives it exclusive power over man. The essential anxiety about non-being is universal and pervades all the processes of life. In the story of the Gethsemane agony, even Jesus experiences it when he decides to obey God despite the inevitability of death. But in conditions of estrangement, this anxiety turns into a fear of death, and an element of guilt is introduced into it. "Sin is the sting of death, not its physical cause. It transforms the anxious awareness of one's having to die into the painful realization of a lost eternity." [2, p. 67-68]

Suffering, like death, is an element of finitude. "It is decisive for the understanding of Christianity and the great religions of the East, especially Buddhism, that suffering as an element of essential finitude is distinguished from suffering as an element of existential estrangement." [2, p. 70] In Buddhism, finitude is seen as evil, and suffering is overcome by self-denial of the will to live. In Christianity, it is necessary to courageously accept suffering as an element of finitude and overcome the suffering that is the result of estrangement. For example, we can talk about suffering that makes sense. But there are many examples where no sense can be detected. The second of these situations is not assumed by an essential being but arises as a consequence of the transition from essence to existence. "Christianity knows that... a victory over destructive suffering is only partially possible in time and space. But whether this fragmentary victory is fought for or not makes all the difference between Western and Eastern cultures, as a comparison shows. This changes the valuation of the individual, of personality, of community, and of history. It has, in fact, determined the historical destiny of mankind." [2, p. 70]

Thus, Tillich gives the following answers to questions about the reconciliation of the Christian doctrine of the Fall with the theory of biological evolution.

1. Man is not responsible for the occurrence of evil, because his fall (as it looks from the world side, i.e. in time) occurred in a world in which evil already existed. But he is morally responsible for giving up his essence, and the blame for this is not removed from him. This understanding of the Fall does not depend on the time of man's appearance on Earth or scientific theories of his origin.
2. "If one is asked how a loving and almighty God can permit evil one cannot answer in the terms of the question as it was asked. One must first insist on an answer to the question How could he permit sin? - a question which is answered the moment it is asked. Not permitting sin would mean not permitting freedom; this would deny the very nature of man, his finite freedom." [2, p. 61] And evil is an implicit consequence of sin.

Explaining the Fall by the freedom of man, Tillich follows classical theology. However, there is one nuance here. The explanation of classical theology is not entirely satisfactory: God could endow man with freedom, but at the same time with the ability to overcome temptations (see, for example, [19]). But in Tillich's theological system this is impossible. Such an ability is incompatible with understanding the existence of man as a state of estrangement from God and own essence.

## 6. Conclusion - from myth to symbol

The theology of reconciliation emerged in the wake of the success of genetics, i.e. half a century after Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. But the time of the emergence of certain theological ideas depends not only on the logic of the theological thought development, but also on external circumstances (in our case, on the achievements of Science). Therefore, in order to understand the logic, it is sometimes useful to disengage from the chronology.

Above we talked about the demythologization of Christianity and that demythologization is possible only up to a certain limit; that religion cannot do without myths and symbols. But demythologization is a convenient language for describing the interaction of Science and religion. In this language, the logic of theological thought can be described as a transition from a mythological understanding of the Fall to a symbolic one.

The concepts of Teilhard de Chardin and F.R. Tennant can be considered as an attempt to completely demythologize the traditional doctrine of the Fall. They reject not just the mythological form used by traditional theology, but the whole myth: the very event of the Fall, the explanation of the evil origin and the understanding of its nature.

The theology of reconciliation is a partial demythologization. The Fall as such is not in doubt, but the myth is modified to one degree or another. The event of the Fall can be transferred closer to our time and interpreted not as a



one-time event but having a longer or shorter duration. Adam and Eve can be considered not as the progenitors of mankind, but as collective images or as a couple chosen by God from an already existing human race. The motives of the Fall can also vary from the abuse of freedom granted by God to selfishness inherited from ancestors in the process of Evolution.

The purpose of these modifications is clear: to eliminate obvious contradictions with scientifically established facts and thereby make the mythical narrative more plausible. But a myth is an organic whole in which all the components (the place and time of the action, the motives of the actors, the essence of sin, trespass, and its consequences) are very precisely fitted to each other. Modification of one of these components leads to modification of others and requires additional explanations (for example, the transfer of the time of action to the Neolithic era requires a change in the status of Adam and Eve and additional considerations about the mechanism of the spread of sin). As a result, serious damage is done to the expressive power of the myth. But plausibility increases insignificantly. In fact, the theology of reconciliation creates new myths: in Orthodox theology, scientific myths and in Catholic and Protestant theology, historical ones are created. It seems that the mythological consciousness, which perceived the myth as a reliable description of the events of the distant past, itself remained in the past. Modern man perceives the myth as an allegory, a parable that needs a rational interpretation. And this reduces the power of the direct impact of the myth.

In Tillich's theology, the mythological understanding is replaced by a symbolic one. According to Tillich, the symbol is a part of the reality of our world, indicating the divine reality. Unlike a sign, which can be replaced by another sign if necessary, "the symbol grows and dies according to the correlation between that which it symbolized and the persons who receive it as a symbol" [20]. Symbols reveal the divine to the human and the human to the divine. If, for example, God is symbolically characterized as a 'the Father', it means that God treats us as a father treats his children, but this relationship is qualitatively and quantitatively infinitely superior to the relationship of fathers and children. On the other hand, when we speak of God as 'the Father', we are looking at fatherhood in its sacred depth.

The symbolic understanding does not refuse to consider the Fall as a real event, bearing in mind the inaccessible to us higher reality. But it refuses to consider it as *an event in time and space*. Thanks to this, theological thought is freed from the complex (but essentially formal) problems of linking a myth to a specific time in order to coordinate it with the data of Science and gets the opportunity to focus on the fundamental problems of the essence of evil, its origin, the causes of man's fall, the impact of this fall on the rest of the world. Reformed theologians were thinking about why the sinless Adam so easily agreed to violate the divine prohibition and believed that Adam fell by divine will. Understanding the Fall as an event outside of time and space allows Tillich to develop a broad concept of the Fall, including such elements as the combination of ethical guilt and tragic fate in the fall of man, the difference

between perfection and ‘dreaming innocence’, the understanding of sin as the estrangement of man from God and from own essence, the difference between suffering due to finiteness and suffering due to estrangement.

Further, resorting to a symbolic understanding, Theology thereby recognizes the incomprehensibility of the Fall for human consciousness. Replacing mythological events and figures with a description of the transition from essence to existence does not allow us to completely get away from the interpretation of the Fall as an event in time and space: after all, the very concept of ‘fall’ implies the initial and final states, i.e. some process in time. But there are no other means to describe the Fall in our language. Therefore, a complete demythologization of the Fall is impossible. It is significant that even Teilhard de Chardin, completely abandoning the myth of the Fall, nevertheless does not abandon the symbolic description, considering the death of Christ on the cross as a symbol of the pain and hard work of Evolution.

The material presented in the article may give the impression that the interaction of Theology and Science occurs according to the following scheme: Science poses questions that Theology is forced to answer. But isn’t such a scheme too simple? Tillich’s *Systematic theology* was created not in connection with the Fall, but as an attempt to solve a large complex of problems that had accumulated in Christian theology by the beginning of the twentieth century. And Tillich didn’t need to coordinate anything with Science. He did not look at Science as a source of problems for Theology; rather, he found in it an indirect confirmation of his theological ideas. It seems that Science and Theology are such spheres of human knowledge that develop according to their own internal laws, even if sometimes they come into contact. So far, such contact of theology with ‘material reality’ brings to it more benefit than contact with ‘spiritual reality’ to Science. But it cannot be excluded that situation will change in the future, and Science will also benefit from such contact.

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