

EXPLORING THE MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION, EDEN, AND THE FALL OF THE PROTO-PARENTS, BRIDGING REVELATION AND SCIENCE

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Liviu Galaction Munteanu,
Creația lumii, Paradisul și Căderea în păcat,
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The Work *Creation, Paradise, and the Fallen Man*, re-edited from texts by Rev. Professor Liviu Galaction Munteanu originally published between 1929 and 1939, signifies a comprehensive exegetical, theological, and interdisciplinary effort. It has been carefully restored and made accessible to today's readers. The volume consolidates three core studies—on the Hexaemeron, biblical paradise, and the interplay of creation, freedom, and sin—examining them with philological precision, a rich patristic perspective, and a willingness to engage with natural sciences. This re-edition is timely: it retains the voice of a scholar from the early 20th century while surprisingly remaining relevant, focusing on harmonizing scriptural insights with modern scientific understandings rather than forcing a synthesis.

The monograph follows a logical structure. The first section, *The history of creation in light of scientific research*, explores the Hexaemeron using a dual approach—philological/historical-exegetical and comparative, contrasting it with ancient cosmogonies and scientific theories in areas like cosmogony, geogony, paleontology, astronomy, and the origins of life. The second section, *The biblical Paradise*, examines the authenticity of the Eden account, compares it with ancient traditions, discusses its localization, and explores the importance of the trees. The third section, *The fall of the proto-parents*, provides a detailed exegesis of Genesis chapter three, incorporating theological reflections on freedom, guilt, and the Protoevangelium. Methodologically, Rev. Liviu Galaction Munteanu combines (a) meticulous philological exegesis, including analysis of Hebrew terms, (b) historical interpretation reviews from patristic to modern times,

(c) an argumentative engagement with scientific findings, and (d) hermeneutic insights aimed at pastoral care. This hybrid methodology maintains both theological depth and scientific accuracy, representing a notable strength of the work.

1. *Hexaemeron* begins with the idea that inspiration requires dialogue with science. After exploring traditional origins and hypotheses about Babylonian influence, the chapter maps out various historical interpretations, including literalism, floodism, restitutivism, concordism/periodism, idealism, vision, allegorism, and liturgism. It suggests cautious criteria for a theological stance: viewing the *Hexaemeron* as primarily historical and revelatory, while recognizing that its form and cosmological elements reflect the language and religious aims of its time. A particularly useful aspect is the comparison with modern cosmogonies, advocating a hermeneutic that sees science and Scripture as non-contradictory: the Bible affirms the transcendent cause, and science explains the material mechanisms — two levels that complement each other. Rich in patristic and critical references, the chapter clearly supports a theology open to scientific understanding.

2. *Paradise*. Liviu Galaction Munteanu makes an exemplary foray into the question of ‘where’ and ‘what’ is Eden: he discusses the authenticity of the text, the repertoire of ancient traditions (Babylonian, Indian, Iranian, Greek, Egyptian, etc.), the semantics of the term ‘gan/paradise,’ and the multiple historical-geographical attempts at identification (Mesopotamia, Armenia, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, Africa, or exotic theories). The strength of this part lies in the balance between respect for the scriptural text and critical openness. The author neither idealises comparative mythologies nor rejects them wholesale; he shows how remnants of an ancient memory are found among many peoples, but the scale of convergences rationally points towards the area between the Tigris and Euphrates as the most plausible ‘cradle’ of the original tradition.

3. *The commentary on Genesis 3* is thorough. The author examines the temptation (the serpent/the devil), human responsibility, the meaning of ‘the knowledge of good and evil,’ the symbolic and actual importance of the trees, the moral and cosmic effects of sin, and the significance of the proto-evangelium (v. 15). Patristic interpretations are used to connect the dogmatic view with the historical narrative: sin is human freedom turned against the Creator, but the punishment does not cancel the promise of salvation. The text embodies patristic insight and a nuanced theology of hope.

Instead of suggesting a simple concordism, the author proposes a hermeneutic model: Scripture serves as the ultimate cause and teleological guide, while science

provides a mechanical and chronological account of processes. This nuanced and rigorous position offers theologians tools to defend the credibility of revelation without resorting to rigid literalism. Lexical studies (such as *midbar*, *eden*, *yom*, *kavod*, etc., across related sections) and attention to Hebrew nuances reveal a philological awareness that enriches theological interpretation. The author advocates for understanding the text's meaning in its context rather than ideological exegesis. He goes beyond mere apologetics by using the Church Fathers to explore spiritual themes like uncreated light, the symbolic importance of trees, and the Protoevangelium. This blend of patristics and science is, in our view, the core insight of the volume. Furthermore, Liviu Galaction Munteanu is not just an exegete; he draws pastoral lessons: the Hexaemeron as a weekly model, Paradise as a symbol of spiritual responsibility, and the fall as a foundation for practical salvation. This approach makes his work valuable to both academic theologians and pastors or catechists.

From a critical standpoint, some sections are heavily detailed with historical and scientific information, which might overwhelm non-specialist readers. Including a more concise introduction or brief summaries at the end of each chapter could improve accessibility. The discussion on Eden's location presents various opinions fairly for its time, but a schematic map and updated geographic appendix with maps and tables would aid understanding. For future editions, incorporating recent genetic and archaeological findings (post-1930) could enhance the discussion on human antiquity and migration. Nonetheless, maintaining the original text respects its historical significance and author's voice.

Creation, Paradise, and the Fallen Man is a serious work, well-argued and generously resourced with erudition, which brings together in a coherent corpus a dialogue between exegesis, patristics, and science. The novelty lies in the integrative way the author reconstructs the Hexaemeron and the account of Eden in contemporary context: not towards scientific conformism, but towards a responsible hermeneutic that preserves the revealed meaning and admits all the openness offered by natural knowledge. For theology students, exegetes, priests, and specialists in the history of ideas, the volume provides a solid foundation for reflection and a methodological model worthy of emulation.

I strongly suggest reading it and using it as a resource for understanding the modern relationship between faith and science.