

Creation out of nothing

Creation out of nothing, or **creation ex nihilo**, is the belief that God (God) created this world out of nothing, *ex nihilo* being Latin for "from nothing." The Bible (Bible) is clear that God is the creator of this world (Gen 1:1; Job 38:1-42:6 among many others), but the issue of *how* he created this world is what is in question. Typically there are two main answers: (1) either God created this world from nothing, or (2) he created this world from pre-existing matter. In the second view God would be the *organizer* or the one who "ordered the chaos" of this world.

Multimedia

- Creation Out of Nothing
(http://www.rfmedia.org/RF_audio_video/RF_podcast/Creation-Out-of-Nothing.mp3) (MP3), by William Lane Craig (William_Lane_Craig)

Creation as ordering

The Bible does portray God as ordering his creation. This idea is especially clear in the image of a potter working his clay into an ordered structure (e.g. Isaiah 29:16; Jer 18:1-6). Although not directly associated with creating the world, this does reflect the character of God as bringing order to his creation.

Early church fathers (Early_church_fathers) such as Theophilus ([index.php?title=Theophilus&action=edit&redlink=1](#)), Justin Martyr (Justin_Martyr), and Origen (Origen) actually believed that matter was pre-existent with God. Borrowed from platonic thought ([index.php?title=Platonism&action=edit&redlink=1](#)), these church fathers believed that God "ordered" this chaotic matter and gave it its shape and form, thus resulting in the creation of the world. As McGrath (Alister_McGrath) notes, "[m]atter was already present within the universe, and did not require to be created; it needed to be given a definite shape and structure" (McGrath, *Theology*, p. 38). There are many problems associated with this view (see below), and this is why by the fourth century most Christian theologians rejected this view.

The battle for creation out of nothing

The doctrine (Doctrine) of creation ex nihilo was mostly developed due to the rising pressure of Gnosticism (Gnosticism). This view drew a distinction between the God of the Old Testament (Old_Testament), the one they believed had created this world, and the God of the New Testament (New_Testament), the one they believed had redeemed this world. The God of the OT was also regarded as a lesser deity than the God of the NT.

Irenaeus (Irenaeus) (130-200) responded, arguing not only against the Gnostic teaching of two Gods, but even more against Greek philosophy which taught that matter had pre-existed and that God became the divine architect as he ordered this pre-existent matter. Irenaeus argued that "[t]here was no preexistent matter; everything required to be created out of nothing" (McGrath, p. 38).

Tertullian (Tertullian) (160-225) later argued that the world depended on God for its existence. This was in contrast to the Aristotelian view that the world depended on nothing. Both the Aristotelian and the Platonic view were at war with the early Christians, but by the fourth century, "most Christian theologians rejected the Platonist approach, even in the form associated with Origen, and argued for God being the creator of both the spiritual and material worlds" (McGrath, 39).

Colin Gunton (Colin_Gunton), one of the greatest British systematic theologians of the 20th century, writes that "...God is not to be likened, let us say, to a potter who makes a pot from the clay which is to hand; he is, rather, like one who makes both the clay and the pot. This teaching, which baffles understanding and is often rejected because there is no analogy to it in human experience, must be understood as an interpretation and summary of scripture's witness to God as a whole," (*The Christian Faith*, p. 17).

Biblical understanding

The Bible does not explicitly state the term "out of nothing" regarding creation. However, biblical scholars do believe that the totality of Scripture does in fact teach this. Looking at such passages as Genesis 1:1ff, Psalms 33:6, Psalms 148:5, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 11:3 gives a more complete picture of how God created the world. Viewing the entire biblical account has allowed theologians to conclude with this interpretation.

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God as architect: a critique

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References

- Alister McGrath (Alister_McGrath), *Theology: the basics*. Blackwell Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1405114258
(<http://www.theopedia.com/Special:BookSources/1405114258>)

Resources

- Colin Gunton (Colin_Gunton), *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Theology*. Eerdmans, 1998. ISBN 0802845754
(<http://www.theopedia.com/Special:BookSources/0802845754>) (esp. chapter 4)
- William Lane Craig (William_Lane_Craig) and Paul Copan (Paul_Copan), *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*. Baker Academic, 2004. ISBN 0801027330
(<http://www.theopedia.com/Special:BookSources/0801027330>)

See also

- Creation (Creation)
- Creationism (Creationism)
- Evolution (Evolution)

External links

- Is Creatio Ex Nihilo A Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination Of Gerhard May's Proposal
(http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/article_exnihilo_copan.html), article by Paul Copan (Paul_Copan)
- An Examination of Creation Ex Nihilo (<http://tektonics.org/af/exnihilo.html>), by James Patrick Holding
- Creation ex Nihilo Magazine
(<http://www.creationists.org/creationmagazine.html>)
- Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to Creatio ex Nihilo
(http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Craig-ExNihiloASA.pdf), by William Lane Craig

- *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 32.1 (March, 1980) 5-13.

- God as Creator of All Things — Including the Material Already Present at Genesis 1:1 (http://michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/2010/08/god-as-creator-of-all-things-including-the-material-already-present-at-genesis-11/#utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=god-as-creator-of-all-things-including-the-material-already-present-at-genesis-11), by Michael Heiser



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