

The Teachings Of The Mormon Church

www.ThreeAngels.com.au

Pre-Existing Matter

http://www.mormonbeliefs.org/mormon_beliefs/mormon-beliefs-the-plan-of-salvation/the-creation

Under the direction of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ created the heavens and the earth (see Mosiah 3:8; Moses 2:1). From scripture revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we know that in the work of the Creation, the Lord organized elements that had already existed (see Abraham 3:24). He did not create the world “out of nothing,” as some people believe.

“Now the word create came from the word baurau, which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and reorganized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end” (Teachings of Joseph Smith, pp. 350-352).

Eternal Matter

<http://www.mormonwiki.org/Creation>

The Mormon doctrine of creation describes how God created the world and everything in it. At first glance it is at odds with the Christian and biblical view of creation, understanding the world to have been organized by God. Mormons agree that "God created the world and everything in it", however they define this differently. The difference hangs on the term "created". Did God create everything from nothing (creation ex nihilo), or did he create everything from pre-existing matter (the LDS view)? The LDS view of creation has many implications in other doctrinal areas, especially those of humanity, God, and Jesus.

Matter is eternal

Foundational to the doctrine of creation is that matter is eternal. Joseph Smith taught this from the very outset and it has continued to be a widely held belief in the Mormon religion today. Everything is composed of this 'eternal matter' and thus, this world is eternal, God is eternal, and even humanity is eternal (i.e. having existed forever). Digging deeper, these things are not eternal in that they have always been what they are for all of eternity (e.g. God has always been God, or a tree has always been a tree), instead, Mormonism teaches that they are composed of this eternal matter and were later formed into what they are today. Thus, God is "eternal" because he is composed of eternal matter. This does not mean that he has always been God. Further more, humanity is eternal because they are composed of this matter as well, yet, they have not always existed as humans.

"To create does not mean to make something out of nothing. Such a doctrine is neither scientific nor scriptural. Nothing remains nothing, of necessity; and no power, human or divine, can make it otherwise.

Creation is organization, with materials at hand for the process. Joseph Smith's position upon this point, though combated by doctors of divinity, is confirmed by the most advanced scientists and philosophers of modern times. The dogma that earth was made out of nothing is an attempt to glorify Deity by ascribing to him the power to perform the impossible - to do that which cannot be done. As if Deity could be glorified with anything of that sort, or had need of any such glorification" (Orson F. Whitney, Saturday Night Thoughts, pp.87-88).

The Creation-First Day

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/compare.shtml>

THE CREATION--FIRST DAY

ELOHIM: Jehovah, Michael, see: yonder is matter unorganized, go ye down and organize it into a world like unto the worlds that we have hereunto formed. Call your labours the First Day, and bring me word.

JEHOVAH: It shall be done Elohim. Come Michael, let us go down.

MICHAEL: We will go down, Jehovah.

JEHOVAH: Michael, see: here is matter unorganized. We will organize it into a world like unto worlds that we have heretofore formed. We will call our labours the First Day, and return and report.

MICHAEL: We will return and report our labours on the First Day, Jehovah.

JEHOVAH: Elohim, we have been down done as thou hast commanded, and have organized a world like unto the worlds that we have heretofore formed, and we have called out labours the First Day.

ELOHIM: It is well.

No Creation Ex Nihilo

<http://sOMEMORMONSTUFF.blogspot.com/2007/05/creation-ex-nihilo.html>

Creation ex nihilo refers to the act of God creating all things (other than himself), without the aid of and precluding the existence of any primeval matter. In simple terms it means creation out of nothing. This concept is accepted by most Christian denominations including the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Churches, and Protestant denominations. Hebrews 11:3 is a common defence of this belief. It reads, "things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Or as it reads in the New American Standard Bible, "that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (See also 2 Macc. 7:28).

There is no creation ex nihilo in the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Consequently, there is the idea that some things cannot be created by God (or are beyond his direct control). When Latter-day Saints use the word creation (as in the creation of the universe) they mean it in the sense of an artist creating a sculpture or painting; that is, that the masterpiece was created from existing materials. In this sense God is seen as a kind of architect of the universe, "the framer of heaven and earth" (D&C 20:17) by whom the universe was "organized and formed" (Abr. 4:1).

Mormon teachings hold that there are a number of things which cannot be created, such as the matter from which the universe was organized (Abr. 4:1), intelligence (Abr. 3:18; D&C 93:26), and truth (D&C 93:26). It could also be argued that that laws of justice are eternal and cannot be created (Alma 42:22): Thus God had to "appease the demands of justice" (Alma 42:15) and it impossible for mercy to rob justice (Alma 42:25). Furthermore, the fact that God had to prepare an elaborate plan of salvation which included sacrificing his Only Begotten Son to reclaim his children from physical and spiritual death strongly suggests that God acts within constraints which, to some extent, are beyond his control. All of these points work against the concept of creation ex nihilo.

There are also things which God created because his wisdom and purpose. Forgiveness of sin and the power of resurrection was brought about out by the atonement (Alma 34:15; 42:23); and laws, such as the law of Moses, can be created for a specific (and sometimes transitory) purpose. Though these things are not created from nothing per se, there was a point when they did not exist. Thus prior to the atonement there was only a preparatory redemption (Alma 13:3; Mosiah 3:13).[1]

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Latter-day Saints are free to consider the uncreated nature of physical laws and more abstract concepts such as mathematics. Is mathematics created or discovered?--Many mathematicians discuss mathematics in terms of discovery. LDS scientists and thinkers can also theorize about physical laws. Is a given physical law created by God or is it a fundamental uncreated law? Are God's physics more refined than ours? Do conservation laws prove that some things cannot be created or destroyed? And so forth.

There are some who argue that the Big Bang theory supports the concept of creation ex nihilo. However, a correct statement would be that nothing about the universe can be known prior to the instant of creation (the Big Bang). This limitation means that nothing can be said about what was before it. Though the idea of the Big Bang harmonizes well with the first cause argument, to say that the Big Bang theory proves creation ex nihilo is spurious reasoning. In the words of the Greek philosopher Parmenides, "I will not let you say or think that it was from what is not; for it cannot be said or thought that anything is not." [2]

Mormon Creation Theories

<http://tektonics.org/af/exnihilo.html>

According to Mormonism, creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is not to be found in the Bible and is untrue: God created the universe out of matter that pre-existed, and ex nihilo creation is a invention of the apostate post-Apostolic church. Within Mormon documents, the clearest statement of this doctrine is not found in any of the Standard Works, but in a quasi-official statement made by Joseph Smith upon the occasion of the funeral of fellow Mormon King Follett:

Now I ask all who hear me why the learned men who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. The reason is they are unlearned...God had materials to organize the world out of chaos, chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles that can never be destroyed, they may be organized and reorganized but not destroyed.

Our questions for consideration are as follows:

What does the Bible teach concerning creation ex nihilo?

Christians today hold firmly to the doctrine of ex nihilo creation, although admittedly, it is not explicitly taught in the Bible: there are only broad hints that are compatible with it.

In his book *Know the Truth* [72], Bruce Milne stands with this view: "While the actual phrase 'out of nothing' does not appear, the idea is clearly taught in the Bible (Genesis 1:1f; Psalm 33:6; John 1:3; Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 1:28; Hebrews 11:3)."

This view, and the view of Gerhard May, is our own: Creation ex nihilo "corresponds factually with the Old Testament proclamation about creation," even though it does not appear explicitly in its pages. [May. CEN, xi -- However, given the way that May's work is cited by popular LDS apologists, one might never know about this distinction he makes.]

On the other hand, the LDS position is more problematic, for it merely assumes that, because there is no explicit outline of an ex nihilo creation, but a very explicit expression of creation using chaotic matter, that the idea that matter is eternal wins by default. But one will not find an explicit statement to that effect in the Bible any more than one will find an explicit statement that matter was created by God from nothing, and the sort of broad hints that we have in support of ex nihilo are decidedly not found for the idea of eternal matter.

Where did the doctrine of creation ex nihilo come from?

The LDS of course attribute this idea to apostasy, although curiously, it is not the Hellenists in the church who are blamed this time around. We shall see that ex nihilo was, in fact, a notion that grew out of normative

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Judaism. (LDS writers will naturally observe that Judaism itself was apostate at the time indicated, but we will see in other essays that this supposition is problematic.)

What does the evidence indicate beyond what the Bible teaches?

It is clear that creation ex nihilo is the only sensible alternative that passes the test of logic. Eternal matter is a logical impossibility.

Matter Eternal? Resolving the "Contradiction"

2 Peter 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water...

This is one of several citations from the Bible and from contemporary Jewish sources which state that God "created" the world using primordial elements. No Christian would dispute these, but with such passages LDS apologists take an unwarranted leap in logic. Mormon apologists merely assume that this primordial matter was *eternal* and thus conclude that creation ex nihilo is false (which ignores that Peter has a specific reason, the parallel to the Flood, for starting with the primordial waters as a reference).

Griffith [Grif.1L, 72] quotes the LDS scholar Keith Norman as saying that the "water" referred to by Peter "apparently has an independent existence, however shadowy."

The "shadow" here is dissolved by the sunlight of direct scrutiny: There is no indication here that the "water" has an independent existence of its own.

Similarly, Bickmore [Bick.RAC, 103] writes of the "seemingly contradictory language" found in Jewish inter-testamental literature and in the New Testament, some of which points towards creation from pre-existent matter, some of which point towards ex nihilo creation. He concludes, in attempting to reconcile such passages, that, "To these ancient writers 'existence' meant organized existence, and 'non-existence' meant chaos." [ibid., 104]

But as we will see, many of the passages in question are ambiguous, and may equate non-existence with chaos; on the other hand, it is far from clear that the equation is not simply non-existence meaning just "non-existence."

The problem with finding the doctrine of ex nihilo unambiguously formulated is that the concept of "nothing" is very difficult to quantify. Just as some societies took a long time coming up with a symbol for zero, so it seems Jewish and Christian thinkers took some time trying to quantify ex nihilo.

Even in modern language, "made out of nothing" is often said as though "nothing" were a "thing" that things can be made out of. A person who is asked to think of nothing will not be able to actually do so: they will generally think of a blank background, which is actually something. Copan [Cop. CEN] cautions wisely against the error in thinking that this can lead to:

Nothingness has not co-existed from eternity with God. "Before" the creation, God was all that there was -- there was no empty space or a dark void or non-existence...

Ex nihilo, on the contrary, expresses the idea that God made the world by mere will of having it appear, without any use of pre-existent materials. Young is correct to say: "At the commonsense level, to speak of making something 'out of nothing' tends to turn nothing into something." [Youn. CE] This is why we are unable to say with certainty that the citations we will examine below, even though they speak of creation from "nothing," may in fact not be statements of ex nihilo. We are just not sure whether "nothing" really means "nothing at all." As Goldstein notes: "the Platonists called pre-existent matter 'the non-existent'." [Gold. CEN]

For this reason, some of the citations offered by Copan favouring creation ex nihilo are not as persuasive as they appear to be. For example, he cites 1QS 3:15 from the Dead Sea Scrolls as saying: "From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before ever they existed He established their whole design, and when,

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

as ordained for them, they came into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change."

This statement can be interpreted as teaching *ex nihilo* -- but, it may not teach it. When the writer says that things "come" from God, and when he speaks of them existing, does he mean that they "came" from nothing, that they are considered to "exist" only as final forms? We simply don't know.

Biblical Ideas

The question of the origin of the doctrine of *ex nihilo* requires a study of Biblical as well as various non-Biblical Jewish texts. We will consider the texts in their presumed historical order.

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

This passage brews a storm of controversy over a single word that is rendered here as "created": the Hebrew word *bara*. Does it indicate *ex nihilo* creation? Griffith [Grif.1L, 72] quotes Norman as saying that although *bara*:

...is usually reserved in the Old Testament for God's activity in forming the world and all things in it, synonymous terms and phrases scattered throughout the Hebrew scriptures take the force out of any attempt to use this fact as evidence that ex nihilo creation is being described in Genesis 1...Luis Stadelmann insists that both bara and yasar carry the anthropomorphic sense of fashioning, while 'asah connotes a more general idea of production.

What is said here is true, but it is far from the complete story. It is true that *bara* is usually reserved for God's activity: Stadelmann [Stad.HCW, 5] describes it as "a technical term designating God's creative activity," noting that "the subject of (*bara*) is exclusively God himself." Stadelmann also adds:

By analyzing God's efficient causality as well as his active control manifested in the world-order as a whole and in each of its aspects and details we find that (bara) expresses, together with its basic meaning of creating, the idea either of novelty or of an extraordinary result. Moreover, since (bara) is the term par excellence for God's creative activity, it is only natural that it also implies the idea of his effortless production by means of his powerful word without any help of outside intervention.

The verb *bara* therefore has no explicit connotation of *ex nihilo*; and yet, that it is linked only with the creative power of God suggests that something more than use of pre-existent matter is in view. (Indeed, the quote Griffith lifts from Norman appears to rather distort what Stadelmann actually says. It is only after noting these things that Stadelmann describes the meanings of *yasar* and *'asah*, and he hardly "insists" upon anything -- he merely describes what the words mean, and despite the tone of Norman's report, in saying that "both *bara* and *yasar* carry the anthropomorphic sense of fashioning, while *'asah* connotes a more general idea of production" Stadelmann in no way detracts from the uniqueness of *bara*.) What that may be is not specified, but creation *ex nihilo* is not excluded, much less is eternal matter implied.

Thus Matthews: "It is an unnecessary leap to conclude that the elements in v. 2 are autonomous, co-eternal with God and upon which he was in some way dependent for creation." [Matt. Gen, 141] Indeed, the fact that eternal matter is not indicated is in itself significant in the context of creation accounts, for as Sarna notes, "Precisely because of the indispensable importance of preexisting matter in the pagan cosmologies, the very absence of such mention here is highly significant." [Sarn. Gen, 5]

Thus we conclude with Von Rad: "It would be false to say...that the idea of creation *ex nihilo* was not present here at all (v. 1 stands with good reason before v. 2!), but the actual concern of this entire report is to give prominence, form, and order to the creation out of chaos..." [Von R. Gen, 51] And Matthews adds: "The declaration of v. 1 without any intimation of competing pre-existing matter is so distinctive from its ancient counterparts that we must infer that all things have their ultimate origin in God as Creator." [Matt. Gen, 129]

In a more recent treatment [Cop.CEN2, 38ff] Copan and Craig offer another argument for understanding Genesis 1:1 in support of *ex nihilo*, having to do with the specific grammar of Genesis 1:1. The question is

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

whether 1:1 is to be read in a *temporal* sense, or an *absolute* sense. If the former, Genesis 1:1 permits (but does not prove) the possibility of pre-existent matter. If the latter, it in no way permits such a thing.

Here are their points on the matter:

- Some suggest that the temporal sense is supported by the lack of an article ("in beginning" as opposed to "in *the* beginning"). However, numerous Hebrew scholars have identified places where a temporal phrase lacks an article, and where such a phrase still has an absolute sense, so this is not a useful objection.
- A temporal reading requires a reading of the Hebrew described as "rambling" and "out of place" among the "staccato sentences" in the rest of the narrative. This works against an argument that a parallel can be made to the temporal structure of Genesis 2:4, alleged to be a parallel. It also relies on seeing Genesis 2:4 as a closing, rather than as an introduction.
- A temporal reading may wrongly take "heavens and the earth" as relating the order of creation; it is rather a merism, or an expression of the totality of what is created. This totality expression eliminates any possibility of a "primordial existence".
- The LXX clearly understood Genesis 1:1 in the absolute sense, as did other Jewish translations.

Proverbs 8:24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.

Within this verse, Copan argues, there lies a significant clue that matter is not eternal, or at the very least, if it is, that it is not to be identified with the waters of Genesis 1:1-2. The word "depths" here is *tehowm*, the same word used of "waters" in Genesis. The indication of this passage would be that there was a time when the waters did not exist. [Cop. CEN]

However, other commentators note that the *tehowm* referred to here are the earth's oceans, in line with the references to earth's other geographical features (mountains and hills) in verses 24-25. It is therefore possible, but unlikely, that this passage indicates creation ex nihilo.

Copan and Craig [Cop.CEN2, 65ff] suggest that ex nihilo is implied otherwise in the OT by passages like Is. 44:6, which speak of YHWH as the "first and the last". Such phrases imply that YHWH is the "ultimate originator and only eternal being".

We now move outside of the Bible and into the time between the testaments. Here we find what some regard as the first true reference to creation ex nihilo:

2 Maccabees 7:28 I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise.

Even some LDS apologists understand creation ex nihilo to be described here, but other commentators disagree. Goldstein finds the terminology ambiguous. [Gold.2Mac, 307-8] Young follows the explanation of Gerhard May that this is "a paraenetic reference to God's power, implying no more than that the world came into existence when it was previously not there...God could conceivably bring into existence 'things' which do not exist before, without such language excluding a pre-existent 'stuff.'" Young also points to May's comparison to a passage in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* in which there is "a reference to parents bringing forth their children 'out of non-being.'" "

Here we run into the very problem we have outlined above: an ancient writer who says "nothing" may not actually mean "nothing". He may mean, "not in a viable form" as Xenophon does. This citation is therefore not useful for defending the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, though Copan and Craig [Cop.CEN2, 96] note that scholars tend to think that it is a clear assertion of ex nihilo creation. They add [98] that given the stress on God's sovereignty, any idea of pre-existent matter would compromise this message.

Copan and Craig add some more inter-testamental and later Jewish cites as evidence [100ff]: Jubilees implies ex nihilo creation in that it says God "created" the waters -- the alleged primordial matter. The Jewish book *Joseph and Asenath* says God "created all" ; as they note, the "sweeping comprehensiveness is difficult to avoid".

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Finally, for example, the Jewish historian Josephus clearly understands Genesis 1:1 in terms of an absolute creation.

Romans 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were.

Romans 4:17 is one of the leading New Testament verses supposed to teach ex nihilo creation, and a few commentators consider it to be indirect evidence of the doctrine. Mormon apologists disagree and offer their own interpretations. Hopkins alleges that translators who work on this verse have wrongly "assumed that the passage is talking about the method of God's creation. But the literal wording of the Greek text does not address the issue of creation at all." Rather, he tells us [Hop. HGP. 293]:

The word-for-word translation is, "God, the (one) making live the dead, and calling the things not being as being."...To understand this expression, one must remember that Paul's letter was addressed to the Romans, a highly Hellenized society in his time. It must also be noted that the word "being" was a term of art in Greek philosophy. It had a specific meaning in Greek metaphysics. "Being" was the word the Platonists used to describe that portion of the metaphysical universe they considered the only true reality...Everything else was "not being" or "becoming." That which was "not being" comprised the sensory universe perceived by Men as reality, but believed by the Greek philosophers to be an illusion.

This passage...is actually giving the Lord's view of metaphysics. What the literal wording would say to a Hellenized audience is that God declares "the things not being," i.e., the sensory universe that the Greeks thought of as an illusion, as "being," i.e., the universe they believed to be reality. The Hellenized Romans of the time were being told that the God of Abraham, who raises the dead, declares that the sensory universe is reality.

Hopkins' exegesis fails to account for some significant problems, the most serious of which is that the church at Rome was comprised in the main of Jewish converts and of Gentile converts to Judaism who then became Christians -- not "highly Hellenized" people.

Far more serious, however, is a contextual problem. Where is the place here for a statement on metaphysics? The context of this verse is the promise to Abraham to become "the father of many nations," a promise fulfilled at first through Isaac. The passage goes on to say:

And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

The "dead", then, who were "quickened", were Abraham and Sarah; the thing which was "called" which "was not as though it were" refers to the declaration that Abraham and Sarah will have heirs, despite their infirmities. Where is there room here for a metaphysical statement about the nature of reality in opposition to Hellenism?

Hopkins is improperly bringing into this verse the uncommon philosophical usage of a very common Greek word ("being"), where the word is being used by a non-philosopher (Paul), in the context of a non-philosophical discussion, and speaking to people who aren't thinking in the way that is supposed at all.

Romans 4:17 is not, indeed, a verse with the issue of creation at its core, but creation does stand in the shadow of it. The premise that God has the power to affect the material universe, to the point that He is able to declare what will or will not exist, suggests a broader context that by extension means that God has the power to create things ex nihilo. However, it does not directly state that the universe was created ex nihilo.

Colossians 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth...

This is one of several cites in which God is said to be the Creator of "all things", and some have deduced that this naturally includes primordial matter. Griffith, however, reduces the force of such cites by noting that the Greek verb used, ktidzo, "carried an architectural connotation...as in 'to build' or 'establish' a city....Thus, the verb presupposes the presence of already existing material." [Grif. 1L, 73]

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Nevertheless, this family of verses (which includes Rom. 11:36, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 4:11) leads to an obvious question. If God "created" all things, then "all things" includes primordial matter. Even granting the architectural connotations of ktidzo, what, then, did God use to build primordial matter? We may run down the scale and propose even smaller bits of primordial matter, and the pattern will repeat itself. It is at this point that we encounter the philosophical and logical problems of rejecting creation ex nihilo -- an issue we will delve into in the final section of this essay.

Hebrews 11:3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

This is the second most popular verse used to support the idea of ex nihilo in the New Testament. Once again, however, Hopkins (Who believes that this verse, like Romans 4:17, is a refutation of the Greek view of the universe; but once again, Hopkins must reconstruct the nature of the audience, and fit the passage into the assumption that a Greek metaphysical point is being refuted that has nothing to do with the context.) disagrees. He writes that this verse does not teach ex nihilo, but rather [Hop. HGP, 293-4]:

(This verse) could be seen as a confirmation of modern scientific views that visible matter is composed of particles too small to be seen by the naked eye.

One may ask whether the ancient readers of this passage would have gotten some sort of point about microscopic particles. Is this the kind of thing the writer of Hebrews would expect his readers to understand?

To be preferred here is the analysis of Lane, who shows that this verse is a polemic against notions prevailing in Platonism and in the Alexandrian Judaism that the author of Hebrews came out of, that the primordial material was a visible mass. This does not equate automatically with ex nihilo, for as Lane points out:

...(T)he clause is a negative assertion; it denies that the creative universe originated from primal material or anything observable. It does not make an unambiguous affirmation of creation out of nothing.

The doctrine is thus at best affirmed negatively [Cop.CRE2, 81], leaving a burden on those who claim that ex nihilo is indeed unbiblical. But now, as we leave the Bible once again to examine Jewish extra-biblical literature, we encounter a truly unambiguous reference that teaches this doctrine.

BR 1.9, Th-Alb:8 A philosopher said to R. Gamiliel: Your God was a great craftsman, but he found himself good materials which assisted him: Tohu wa-Bohu, and darkness, and wind, and water, and the primeval deep. Said R. Gamiliel to him: May the wind be blown out of that man! Each material is referred to as created. Tohu wa-Bohu: "I make peace and create evil"; darkness: "I form the light and create darkness"; water: "Praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters" -- why? -- "For he commanded, and they were created"; wind: "For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, and created the wind"; the primeval deep: "When there were no depths, I was brought forth".

Our final cite of interest is a complex and curious one. In this fifth-century passage, the second-century Jewish rabbi Gamiliel II is depicted answering a philosopher's charge that God was "assisted" by certain materials in creation, by citing in each case a place in the Old Testament where a given material is said to have been created by God. Could we have here a clear statement of ex nihilo creation? May believes that we do. [May.CEN, 23]

Winston on the other hand thinks that we do not, for several reasons. [Wins.Pre, 32]

First, he notes that other rabbis expressed a belief in creation out of primordial matter. However, this is hardly problematic, for as Goldstein notes, "(Gamiliel's) views on points of law were not universally accepted either. Rabbis could differ on weight issues of theology." One might suggest that Gamiliel II was simply the first one recorded to think the matter through.

Second, Winston insists that the account must be interpreted in a different light: "What bothered the rabbis were the Gnostic heresies that insisted on multiple creative powers." These materials, thus, are to be understood as representative of those creative powers, and Gamiliel is objecting to a suggestion of polytheism, not to eternal matter.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

But Winston's response is far from persuasive. It is not clear, first of all, that the philosopher in question is a Gnostic. As Goldstein observes, he "could have been a Jewish Greek, for his interpretation of Genesis 1:2 was also given by Philo, and even by the Christian, Justin." [Gold.CEN2] Beyond that, the very text bespeaks a "Gnostic reaction" explanation:

The philosopher compares God to a painter working with pigments...the pigments enter only as material use by the Painter. Nothing in the text suggests that the pigments have will and power. Winston stresses that the verb 'help' is ambiguous and can refer to active powers as well as inactive instruments. The ambiguity of the verb is unimportant because the nouns are unambiguous: we deal here with a Painter and with pigments. The passage can only be a protest against the doctrine of creation from pre-existent matter, not a protest against a theory that other active powers participated with God in creation.

We therefore argue, with Goldstein, that the response of Gamiliel II offers a clear and unambiguous affirmation of creation ex nihilo. (Goldstein adds that it is unlikely that a later view was assumed upon Gamiliel, given that (as Winston points out) other rabbis are not depicted as offering the same view, as would have happened had someone arbitrarily put the doctrine in Gamiliel's mouth long after the fact.) The significance of this will be discussed in our next section.

It is interesting that Winston, after offering this reasoning, seems to acknowledge that this argument by Gamiliel II is a true statement of ex nihilo creation, yet he appears to try to lessen its importance by saying that it "came only under the impact of a polemic with someone who was a Gnostic. In the context of such a confrontation, it would only be natural for R. Gamiliel to counter with the notion that even the apparently primordial elements to which the Gnostic ascribed a dynamic cosmogonic function were created by God."

But this is exactly what we would expect to happen. It is only when the necessity to answer the question, "Where did the matter come from?" arises that the need to formulate a doctrine of creation ex nihilo becomes essential.

Curiously, in a work co-authored by two chief LDS apologists, the reader is referred to Goldstein's first article, with the notation that Goldstein considers the cite of Gamiliel to be "unequivocal" evidence of an ex nihilo doctrine. The reader then is told, "But see the reply by Winston," with no critical evaluation at all. Goldstein's strong response to Winston is not mentioned, although it had been available for quite some time. See Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 96.

Creation from Nothing, From Nothing?

We have seen that creation ex nihilo emerged in the context of Judaism, and in response to a pressing question about creation. Now since the LDS assert that matter is eternal, they must argue in turn that creation ex nihilo came out of an apostasy; but since the Greeks also believed that matter is eternal, the LDS must admit that the doctrine did not come from the "usual" apostasy and find another source for it. Bickmore attempts an explanation thusly [Bick. RAC, 100]:

Perhaps in a misguided attempt to give more glory to God, Christian philosophers of the late second century discarded the early Christian and Jewish idea of creation from chaos in favour of the theory of creation ex nihilo, as formulated by the Gnostic philosopher Basilides. According to Hatch, this theory penetrated the Christian community through Tatian in the second half of the second century...

The idea that matter is eternal is clearly stated in the works of Plato, and indeed, some early Christian writers went as far as suggesting that Plato borrowed the idea from Genesis. [Cop.CEN, 82-3 -- Copan lists Justin Martyr, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Jewish writer Philo as thinkers who interpreted the Bible in light of Plato in deciding that it taught that matter was eternal. Ironically, Justin and Philo are two of the most-often vilified names when the Latter-day Saints try to pin down who was responsible for the church's apostasy.]

Of course such confusion and inconstancy of thought is not altogether impossible. Nevertheless, LDS apologists like Bickmore must explain away this inconsistency in any attempted reconstruction of the social history of the Christian church, and it can only make such a reconstruction more difficult to formulate (and, in our view, less believable).

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

What, then, of the actual origin of the idea of creation ex nihilo? Some suggest, in agreement with Bickmore's analysis, that it was part of a response to the dualistic idea that matter was evil, inferior, or resistant to God's actions. Winston, for example, argues that "the concept of creation ex nihilo formed no part of Greek philosophical thought nor of Jewish Hellenistic or rabbinic thought" and first explicitly appears in second-century Christian literature "under the impetus of the Gnostic challenge" and on the grounds "that creation out of an eternal primordial element would compromise the sovereignty of God." [Win. Pre, 25 -- Other studies on this issue see Basilides' ideas as being parallel to, and independent of, the church's adoption of the doctrine. "...(N)o influence whatsoever on church theology can be discerned...(it is) parallel to, not a step towards, the church teaching of creation ex nihilo." -- May. CEN, 180]

Goldstein, as we have seen, refutes the argument that creation ex nihilo was not found in rabbinic thought, and has raised the proposition that the doctrine arose out of a need to explain how resurrection bodies could be re-composed when their original decomposed matter had presumably been scattered to the winds. Gold. CEN, Gold.CEN2 -- . The evidence Goldstein adduced for this view, he later admitted, following a response by Winston, to have misinterpreted: See David Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 88-91, and Goldstein, "Recantations."

Rather disturbingly, however, Bickmore summarizes the exchange between Goldstein and Winston in a way that can only be described as disingenuous. In reference to Goldstein as one who maintains that creation ex nihilo "originated within Judaism," Bickmore merely writes: "After a debate with David Winston, Goldstein admitted that his position was weak."

Goldstein admitted that his line of reasoning concerning an origin for the doctrine was weak; he did, however, resoundingly reaffirm his position that the doctrine is found in the Gamiliel passage, and as we have seen above, refuted Winston's contentions about that passage. One is certainly compelled to ask why Bickmore has summarized the interchange in a way that suggests that Goldstein offered a complete surrender.

Through each of these ideas, there runs a certain core which is undoubtedly true: Regardless of for what reason it came about, the doctrine of ex nihilo probably did emerge as a "defensive" measure. It was a response to some question that was asked, and if we want to know why it took so long to formulate, the answer is that the need to do so did not arise until the Judeo-Christian tradition confronted the questions that required it. "...Jewish thought was preoccupied with the God of the cosmos rather than with the cosmos itself, with the creation rather than the ex nihilo." [Cop. CEN 84] It would take time before either Jews or Christians could finish the "what" and concern themselves with the "how."

But the real question is not who came up with idea, and whether it came from the mouth of a heretic, a rabbi, or a believer, but whether or not it is Scriptural, or compatible with Scripture, and actually true. We have seen that creation ex nihilo is neither scriptural nor unscriptural, so we must now turn the second question: Is it true?

Out of the Bible

Having concluded our examination of the Bible, and finding that there are only broad hints of, but no explicit reference to, ex nihilo creation; but also absolutely no indication, not even broad hints, that matter is eternal, what is left to be done to determine one way or another whether this doctrine is true? The issue involves many philosophical points which are beyond our general scope, but we will briefly consider the central philosophical proof for creation ex nihilo.

The classic theistic argument for creation ex nihilo is known popularly as the First Cause argument. Simply put, everything that happens requires a cause, leading back to the principle of a first, "uncaused" cause in the person of God. A key aspect of the First Cause argument is the premise that it is impossible to traverse an infinite distance. Since this is true, the universe must have had a beginning, for if the universe had in fact an infinite existence, today would never take place!

Popular Mormon apologist Richard Hopkins attempts to engage this issue logically, but ironically, in so doing, he falls into a "Hellenistic" trap. His answer to the problem of traversing an infinite is as follows [Hop.HGP, 401-3]:

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Modern mathematics has shown that the finite and the infinite are not so far removed from each other as the ancient Greeks supposed...the number of points on a line of finite length, say two inches, is infinite regardless of the length of the line. That is because a point is infinitely small, at least in theory.

Hopkins goes on to apply this argument to time, thusly:

Any finite period of time, like any finite distance, can be divided into an infinite number of infinitesimal time segments (usually designated "dt" in calculus)..an infinite number of dt can have a distinct beginning and a definite end.

Hopkins applies this argument indirectly to the classical theistic argument for creation ex nihilo, approaching it from the issue of whether God exists inside or outside time and concluding that there is no problem with crossing an infinite distance.

However, Hopkins' argument is one that was discovered -- and refuted -- quite a long time ago, and ironically enough, his argument has as much of a Hellenistic "root" as the concepts of God and eternity that he so roundly criticizes. Hopkins' arguments are a re-formulation of the famous motion paradoxes of Zeno the Greek philosopher (c. 490-430 B.C.). Zeno presented the idea that motion was an illusion (and that the "real world" was illusory and false) by giving the example of a race which covers a certain amount of territory. The runner first covers half of the territory, then half of what remains, then half again of what remains, and so on, never reaching the end of the race because he is continually "splitting the difference" between the remaining distances.

This is called an antimony of infinite divisibility. But Zeno, and Hopkins, fall to the same error, which is the failure to distinguish between a potential infinite and an actual infinite. J. P. Moreland distinguishes between an actual and a potential infinite in a way that Hopkins does not [More. ScSy, 22]:

...(A) potential infinite is always finite. A potential infinite can increase forever and it will never become an actual infinite. Adding one more member to a finite set, no matter how often this is done, will simply result in a larger finite set.

Hopkins' examples of a line, and time, fail on the same point. He has not distinguished between these "infinities" and the actual infinite that would be involved in a universe in which matter was eternal. The idea of eternal matter therefore remains, in spite of Hopkins, a logical impossibility.

It appears that Hopkins is unclear on exactly what classical theists say that a universe with a beginning would imply: "If one were to identify a beginning in real space-time, the question would have to be asked, 'What happened before that?' or 'What's on the other side of that?' The answer would always be 'more time' or 'more space.'" [Hop. HGP, 185] This is simply not the classical theistic view. There is no "before" for there is no time; there is no "other side" for there is no space. For a discussion of this philosophical aspects of the issue, see William Lane Craig, "God, Time, and Eternity," *Religious Studies* 14 (1978): 497-503, and Thomas D. Senor, "Divine Temporality and Creation Ex Nihilo," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (January 1993): 86-92.

Hopkins, however, is not alone in defending the LDS viewpoint. A Mormon analysis of this problem by Blake Ostler, made in response to Christian philosophers Francis Beckwith and Stephen Parrish, offers this reply [Ost. MCG]:

Now this argument consists of a mistaken view that all infinities must be equal and expresses a mere prejudice against an actual infinite-and nothing more. Once one grasps the intricacies of infinite set theory (which the authors have apparently failed to do) there is nothing contradictory in unequal infinities. This conclusion may be strange or even exciting, but not incoherent.

The fallacy is that, as the mathematician Cantor has elegantly shown, not all infinite sets must be equal. Cantor bids us to consider two infinite but unequal sets, the set of all ordinal numbers and the set of all even numbers. The coherence of infinite sets that are unequal can be demonstrated by pairing members of each set in a one-to-one correspondence. Even though both sets are infinite, the set of even numbers is only half as large as the set of ordinal numbers. (Beckwith and Parrish) acknowledge a coherent mathematical theory in which infinities are not equal, but they object that a mere coherent theory of infinite numbers does not mean that there could actually be an infinite collection in the real world (pp. 66-67). Yet their claim is precisely that the notion is logically "incoherent." How can they admit such coherence and yet claim that unequal infinities cannot occur in

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

the actual world? If the notion is logically coherent, then there is a possible world in which it can obtain. The further question as to whether an infinite collection actually exists is not an issue of logic but of empirical evidence-and they offer no evidence that such infinities are impossible in the actual world.

What Beckwith and Parrish actually "acknowledge" is that "it is possible for mathematicians to talk coherently about infinite sets" [Beck. MCG, 66] -- just as it is possible to talk coherently about two and two making five; yet this is hardly something that is logically possible.

Beyond that, the attempt to demonstrate that infinite sets can be somehow "unequal" is little more than a shell game, literally. Consider these progressions that would appear in the theoretical sets of "all ordinal numbers" on one hand, and the set of "all even numbers" on the other:

[...1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...]

[...2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12...]

Are there really part of two "unequal yet infinite" sets as Ostler supposes? Not at all. The second set merely substitutes different symbols to express the same concept. Ostler argues that these sets are now both infinite, yet unequal. But if a magician changed the members of the first set into oranges, and the members of the second set into apples, will the sets be infinite yet unequal?

Of course not. The second set merely uses symbols which represent quantities which are double that of the symbols in the first set; and yet the quantity of members of the two sets is still equal, as can be proven by enumerating the members of the sets:

[...1 (1 member), 2 (2 members), 3 (3), 4 (4), 5 (5), 6 (6)...]

[...2 (1 member), 4 (2 members), 6 (3), 8 (4), 10 (5), 12 (6)...]

Put it this way: The members of the second set are nothing more than the members of the first set wearing different outfits.

I'll add here that Ostler either misreports or misunderstands a number of Beckwith and Parrish's points. For example, Beckwith and Parrish originally respond to an argument against an actual infinite that Ostler describes thusly:

Several different versions of the argument designed to show that an actual infinite is impossible are given by the authors. The first version is roughly that it is impossible to traverse an infinite number of days, for no matter how long one were travelling, one would still only have travelled a finite number of days. Since the universe began "an infinite number of days ago," it could never reach the present. Unless one can reach an "infinite number of days ago" the universe cannot be infinitely old.

However, this type of argument commits the (rather obvious) logical fallacy of composition. It assumes that the first day in an infinite set must have the same properties as the infinite set of days, that is, that some day is the "infinite day." There is no such thing as a day which occurred an "infinite number of days ago" simply because there is no such thing as the "infinite day." The same fallacy is committed when a person asserts that a large crowd of people must be a crowd of large people-and that also is clearly false. It is also like saying there cannot be an infinite number of integers unless one of them is the "infinite" integer-which is clearly wrongheaded. Thus one who believes that the universe is infinitely old does not assert that one of those days was the infinite day which occurred an infinite number of days ago. Rather, any given day occurred a finite time ago even though there is an infinite set consisting of days during which the world has existed. There simply is no first day, so the argument is invalid.

The first paragraph is a misleading description of the basic argument. Beckwith and Parrish do not argue that the universe began "an infinite number of days ago"; they argue that the Mormon position requires that the universe had no beginning, and that the infinite time prior to the present could never have been traversed so that the present is reached. Ostler is either misunderstanding or grossly misrepresenting the argument.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

I can now add that Cantor has also been misused by Ostler. An argument like Ostler's "misconstrues the nature of both Cantor's system and modern set theory, for the argument does not in fact contrasict a single tenet of either...Cantor's system and set theory may be taken to be simply a universe of discourse, a mathematical system based on certain adopted axioms and converntions." [Cop.CEN2, 201] It is not meant to argue for the actual existence of an actual infinite.

Conclusion

One may perhaps argue justly that there is nothing in the Bible that indicates a belief in creation ex nihilo, but one will assuredly not find the teaching that matter is eternal. Where the Bible is silent or ambiguous, there is no fault in applying universal principles and logic, and these principles -- which are not merely the province of Hellenism -- lead to the conclusion of ex nihilo creation.

-JPH

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Is Creation Ex Nihilo A Post-Biblical Invention?

An Examination Of Gerhard May's Proposal

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"Let this, then, be maintained in the first place, that the world is not eternal, but was created by God."

- John Calvin, *Genesis*

I. Introduction

The noted philosopher of science Ian Barbour has boldly declared, "*Creation 'out of nothing' is not a biblical concept.*"¹ Rather, so he claims, the doctrine was merely a post-biblical development to defend God's goodness and absolute sovereignty over the world against "Gnostic ideas regarding matter as evil or as the product of an inferior deity."² Furthermore, in Barbour's view, the Bible is not simply ambiguous about the nature of God's relationship to creation but actually asserts that God created from pre-existent materials:

Genesis portrays the creation of order from chaos, and ... the *ex nihilo* doctrine was formulated later by the church fathers to defend theism against an ultimate dualism or a monistic pantheism. We still need to defend theism against alternative philosophies, but we can do so without reference to an absolute beginning.³

Now if it can continue to be shown that the Big Bang is the most convincing scientific theory, Barbour states, "the theist can indeed see it as an instant of divine origination." However, the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* is not theologically necessary: "this is not the main concern expressed in the religious notion of creation."⁴

Along similar lines, Arthur Peacocke in his 1978 Bampton Lectures asserted that "the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation" only implies that the world owes its existence to God, which would not contradict science were it to discover that the cosmos is eternal.⁵ So the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* is of marginal theological significance for Peacocke as well. Instead, both he and Barbour emphasize preservation in God's creation of the universe rather than its temporal beginning.

Langdon Gilkey, whose *Maker of Heaven and Earth* has significantly influenced Barbour and Peacocke, loosely outlines what he believes the Christian doctrine of creation of out nothing is: (1) God is the source of all that there is; (2) creatures are dependent, yet real and good; (3) God creates in freedom and with purpose. But although the doctrine's essential element of the universe's dependence on God is clear, what Gilkey omits is any clear reference to the material world's absolute beginning.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Is the traditional Christian belief in *creation ex nihilo*, God's creation of the universe out of nothing, one that is *inherent* to biblical doctrine or one that is simply *compatible* with it? Is *creation ex nihilo* nothing more than a defensive theological reaction to Gnosticism? Moreover, does the well-accepted Big Bang theory confirm the allegedly biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing? Is it solely up to science rather than Scripture to point us toward the nature of God's creation - whether it is finite or eternal?

These questions are explored afresh by Gerhard May, Professor of Theology at the Johannes Gutenberg Universität in Mainz, in his book *Creation ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought*.⁶ May answers that Christian thinkers in the second century tried to reconcile their belief in a God who creates freely and unconditionally with Greek metaphysics, resulting in their formulation of the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* (p. 2). Up to this point, there had been no explicit formulation of precisely how God created the world. May also claims that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is "not demanded by the text of the Bible" (p. 24). All that the NT asserts is that creation is *dependent upon* Christ and is subordinate to him (p. 29). The idea of the universe's ontological origination from God is not evident in Scripture, according to May.

May's book serves as a convenient entrée into a new examination of *creation ex nihilo*. This is particularly important because May's book is both incorrect and potentially misleading. The book is incorrect in that it does not portray the biblical and relevant extra-biblical Jewish and Christian writings accurately or fairly. Also, May's book could mislead people into thinking, as Barbour does, that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is only a Christian theological innovation (as opposed to its being a biblical formulation).

II. What Creation Ex Nihilo Is

Before exploring these themes, we must first ask what is meant by *creation ex nihilo*. May states that this doctrine proclaims "the absolutely unconditioned nature of the creation and specifies God's omnipotence as its sole ground" (p. xi). The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 formally declared:

We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God ... the Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; who from the very beginning of time by His omnipotent power created out of nothing [*de nihilo condidit*] both the spiritual beings and the corporeal.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) asserts that "It pleased God ... in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein" (IV.I). In contrast to process theology's affirmation of creation out of eternal chaos, the Christian doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* maintains God's creation out of absolute nothingness. God is not merely "with" all creation as its Preserver but is also "before" all creation as its Originator.⁷

In general, it seems that at least two things are implied by the doctrine of creation out of nothing: (1) all things are ontologically dependent upon God; and (2) the universe began and has not always existed.⁸ This doctrine goes beyond the assertion that the universe either somehow "depends" upon or is subordinate to God or Christ, both of which options allow for the possibility of God's having shaped pre-existent matter as a mere artificer.

Hinting at these two ideas, Augustine argued that since God alone is Being, he willed to exist what formerly did not exist. So he is not a mere shaper of formless and eternal primordial matter: "You did not work as a human craftsman does, making one thing out of something else as his mind directs... Your Word alone created [heaven and earth]."⁹ *Creation ex nihilo* then refers to the ontological origination of the material world by divine decree.¹⁰

Translated into the contemporary physicist's terms, the spatio-temporal world was created by God's word at the Big Bang, the beginning event and initial cosmic singularity (which has been dubbed $t=0$ or t_0). Astronomers John Barrow and Joseph Silk state that science points to "the traditional metaphysical picture of creation out of nothing, for it predicts a definite beginning to events in time, indeed a definite beginning to time itself."¹¹ "Before" this initial singularity, space, time, matter, and motion did not exist. There was simply nothing (the simpler term for "infinite density").¹² It must be added that when we speak of nothing, we must not imagine

"nothing" as empty space or "an area of non-existence alongside of or over against the existence of God which would thereby be reduced to an existence with limitations."¹³ Nothingness has not co-existed from eternity with God. "Before" the creation, God was all that there was - there was no empty space or a dark void or non-existence, and he himself is both "pure and eternal existence and the source of all other existence, which is derived from and dependent on his existence."¹⁴

III. An Expansion Of May's Thesis

May argues that the Christian doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* emerged in order to "express and safeguard the omnipotence and freedom of God acting in history" (p. 180). During the latter part of the second century, this doctrine emerged through controversy with two schools of thought: Gnosticism (with its emphasis on emanations) and Middle Platonism (with its belief in eternally pre-existent matter). Before this period, there was no real discussion about the doctrine of creation.

Gnostics generally had a negative view of the material world, and they believed that it came into being as the result of a disturbance of the original divine plan through the fall of some Aeon at the bottom of the emanation ladder. (In the case of the Valentinians, it was the Aeon Sophia.) Around the middle of the second century, the Christian Gnostic Basilides (who believed Jesus was a mere man on whom the heavenly light descended at his baptism) was the first to articulate that God created matter - in seed form (the "world-seed") - in a single act of creation. After this initial creation, however, God played no further role in creating. For Basilides, God was not merely a craftsman or artificer, as Middle Platonists believed. He was the originator of matter. Despite Basilides' un-gnostic characterization of God's direct creation of matter, his followers soon abandoned his main teachings. Yet the Christian Church soon thereafter came to formulate the doctrine of creation out of nothing *independently* of Basilides' influence (p. 180).

Tatian became the "first Christian theologian known to us who expressly advanced the proposition that matter was produced by God" (p. 150). Following on his heels, Theophilus of Antioch asserted it more forcefully: "God has created everything out of nothing into being." While Theophilus commended Plato's belief that God is uncreated, he disagreed with the notion that matter existed co-eternally with him, which would make matter equal to him: "But the power of God is manifested in this, that out of things that are not He makes whatever He pleases."¹⁵ With Irenaeus, the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* was well established. He also argued that the world was not coeternal with God:

But the things established are distinct from Him who has established them, and what [things] have been made from Him who has made them. For He is Himself uncreated, both without beginning and end, and lacking nothing. He is Himself sufficient for this very thing, existence; but the things which have been made by Him have received a beginning... He indeed who made all things can alone, together with His Word, properly be termed God and Lord; but the things which have been made cannot have this term applied to them, neither should they justly assume that appellation which belongs to the Creator.¹⁶

Consequently, Christian apologists like John of Damascus came to distinguish between God's "creating" or "making" and his "generating" or "begetting." The former refers to producing something that is essentially or ontologically distinct from its creator while the latter refers to that which is derived from the essence of God.¹⁷ Augustine himself simply declared that God "created heaven and earth out of nothing."¹⁸

In tracking the development of the doctrine of creation out of nothing, Middle Platonism, which ran from the latter half of the first century BC to the first half of the third century AD, significantly figures in our discussion. The central metaphysical theme of Plato, the doctrine of Ideas, came to be replaced by God. Even though God was the Ground of all Being, the eternity of matter was generally accepted. May argues that the Christian doctrine of creation was completed in its controversy with Middle Platonism,¹⁹ when "God" had come to replace the "Ideas" or "the Good" of Plato's original writings. Plato's Demiurge, "the Maker and Father of All," in his *Timaeus* came to be equated with the supreme God (p. 4).²⁰

Before examining some of May's contentions, we cannot overlook the fact that Christian theologians like Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria were greatly indebted to many aspects of Platonism. Church historian

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Jaroslav Pelikan remarks that, notwithstanding Clement of Alexandria's claim that Plato was "indebted to the Hebrews" for his ideas in the *Timaeus*, Clement himself was indebted to the *Timaeus*.²¹

Justin also, under Platonist influence, declared that Plato's belief in God's creating from pre-existing matter was "from no other source than from Moses."²² He appealed to the unfortunate translation of the Septuagint in Gen 1:2, the earth had been "invisible and unfashioned" before God created the cosmos that we "perceive by the senses."²³ Also, Basil of Caesarea's *In Hexaemeron* (2.2) takes the Platonic view of creation, declaring God to be the "artificer" and that matter "came to the creator from without"; consequently, "the world results from a double origin [**ἀρχῆ**].

Pelikan asserts that Plato's *Timaeus* in its vocabulary (e.g., the **δημιουργός**) and conceptual framework had an influence on Eastern theology (although in many fundamental respects it transcended the Platonic and Neoplatonic framework).²⁴ The Cappadocian fathers with regularity turned to Plato's *Timaeus* when explaining the creation.²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa asserted that the Classical notion of "two eternal and unbegotten existences, having their being concurrently with each other" represented "an intuition that was valid in Christian thought":²⁶ that the one God who was the Creator had always stood in a relationship to his creation, but did not need the world to know the meaning of authentic relationship because of the Trinity's interrelationship from eternity.²⁷ So although matter had existed co-eternally with God, matter was in some sense contingent and dependent upon God.²⁸

The Jewish theologian, Philo of Alexandria, makes statements that at times reflect the belief that God's creating was actually a shaping of pre-existing matter: "Just as nothing comes into being out of that which has no existence, so nothing is destroyed into that which has no existence."²⁹ But even in the Philonic view of creation, some ambiguity exists since at times Philo expresses himself along the lines of *creation ex nihilo*. For instance, he writes that "God, the begetter of all things, not only brought them into sight, but even made things which previously had no existence, being not merely an artificer but the Creator Himself."³⁰

The Wisdom of Solomon, a book strongly influenced by hellenistic philosophy, reflects the Platonic notion that creation is "out of formless matter [*ex amorphou hyles*]" (11:17). This concept of "formless matter" is found in both Plato³¹ and Aristotle.³²

Despite the undeniably strong influence of Middle Platonism upon these thinkers, we must be cautious about attributing ambiguity to the biblical text about creation out of nothing simply because of the overlapping of certain concepts common to both Middle Platonism and Scripture. F. F. Bruce reminds us that "the idea of imposing form on pre-existent matter is Greek rather than Hebrew in origin."³³

IV. Confirmation Of *Creation Ex Nihilo*

May asks "why the Jewish theology of antiquity did not bring its conception of creation to the unambiguous conceptual form of ... *creation ex nihilo*" (p. 23).³⁴ Why did it only arise later in the context of Christianity in the second century? May answers that the colliding of Platonism and Gnosticism with Christian beliefs gave rise to the doctrine of creation out of nothing. However, it must be remembered that Jewish thought was preoccupied with the God of the cosmos rather than with the cosmos itself,³⁵ with the creation rather than the *ex nihilo*.³⁶ The OT viewed natural phenomena primarily as pointers to God, who created them and whose glory was revealed through them. For example, Psalm 104, which describes the awe-inspiring natural world, begins:

O LORD my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
To these writers, God was the "King of the Universe."³⁷

We can go further by asserting that the *Umwelt* of OT Judaism (and, by implication, that of early Christianity) furnished an appropriate context for belief in creation out of nothing. Such a belief would not have been foreign to the Hebrew (and early Christian) mentality. To give support to this claim, we will note a variety of relevant

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

extra-biblical Jewish and Christian passages that attest to the fact that *creation ex nihilo* was not alien to biblically-influenced thinking.

Many have suggested that the intertestamental book of 2 Maccabees states clearly the traditional doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*. There a mother pleads with her son willingly to accept torture rather than recant his beliefs:

I beg you, child, look at the sky and the earth; see all that is in them and realize that God made them out of nothing [**ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ ἑνὸς ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ Θεός**], and that man comes into being in the same way. (7:28)

Although May thinks that this passage does not have the necessary doctrinal context for the idea of *creation ex nihilo* (pp. 6, 16), others are not so convinced. For example, Gerhard von Rad maintains, "The conceptional formulation *creation ex nihilo* is first found" in this passage.³⁸ Moreover, to say that there was no doctrinal context at all for such a statement does not seem quite right. After all, the Jewish understanding of creation was that "the world as a whole can only be understood in the context of its coming into being."³⁹ It is, then, not a far step from this assumption to creation out of nothing.⁴⁰

We find another reference to creation out of nothing in the Dead Sea Scrolls (which May does not even mention):

From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before ever they existed He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change. (1QS 3:15)

The noted first-century rabbi, Gamaliel, seems to have reflected this concept of creation in his thinking (although May calls this an "isolated" reference [p. 23]). A philosopher challenged him, "Your God was indeed a great artist, but he had good materials [unformed space/void, darkness, water, wind, and the deep] to help him." Gamaliel, responded, "All of them are explicitly described as having been created by him [and not as preexistent]."⁴¹

In the early Christian homily, *Shepherd of Hermas*, the first command is to believe that God brought all things "into existence out of non-existence."⁴² Denis Carroll claims that this is the first allusion to *creation ex nihilo* in Christian literature.⁴³

The Jewish pseudepigraphical book *Joseph and Aseneth*, whose date of composition is estimated to be between the second century BC and the second century AD, contains a passage which also seems to imply *creation ex nihilo*. Aseneth, having thrown her idols out of the window and put on sackcloth for a week, addresses the God of Joseph:

Lord God of the ages,
who created all (things) and gave life (to them),
who gave breath of life to your whole creation,
who brought the invisible (things) out into the light,
who made the (things that) are and the (ones that) have an
appearance from the non-appearing and non-being,
who lifted up the heaven
and founded it on a firmament upon the back of the winds ...
For you, Lord, spoke and they were brought to life,
because your word, Lord, is life for all your creatures. (12:1–3)

2 *Enoch*, which was written in the late first century AD, also reflects the doctrine of creation out of nothing in a couple of places: "I commanded ... that visible things should come down from invisible" (25:1ff.); "Let one of the invisible things come out solid and visible" (26:1). Composed around AD 100, the *Odes of Solomon* (written originally in, most probably, Syriac)⁴⁴ seem to indicate creation out of nothing:

And there is nothing outside of the Lord,
because he was before anything came to be.
And the worlds are by his word,
And by the thought of his heart. (16:18–19)

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

May passes off this passage, asserting, "Yet in their whole essence the Odes are unphilosophical. Their thought and diction are poetically descriptive, not speculative" (p. 37). But this comment seems overly dismissive; it appears that May, when confronted with a fairly clear obstacle to his position (as this passage quite obviously is), strains to find some loophole to support his thesis. But after noting quite a long string of such dismissals, one eventually suspects him of having an inflexible and closed historiography.

In the early second century, the author of *2 Baruch* wrote: "O thou ... that hast fixed the firmament by the word, ... that hast called from the beginning of the world that which did not yet exist" (21:4). In his dissertation on *2 Baruch*, Frank James Murphy comments that *creation ex nihilo* is being expressed here, indicating that the present visible world is not eternal. It had a beginning.⁴⁵ Once again, May does not comment on this passage.

A final example is taken from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which was written perhaps as early as the mid-second century AD and which reflects a belief in creation out of nothing. The "one who is truly God" is "the one who is before things that have been made ... the only one without origin, and without a beginning." The eternal God is the one through whom "all things" have been made. He is "first by nature and only one in being" (8.12.6, 8).⁴⁶

Because of the slant of May's thesis, he repeatedly dismisses some of these extra-biblical passages (and omits the mention of others entirely). But it seems that we have here sufficient references to creation out of nothing to call into question the assertion that this doctrine was nothing but a late second-century phenomenon. And despite various aberrations in this belief among some Jewish and Christian thinkers through the influence of Platonism, the conviction that God created absolutely everything ("before" which was nothing) is taken for granted by a good number of pertinent independent sources; this fact also casts serious doubt upon May's allegations regarding the ambiguity of the biblical text, to which we now turn.

V. Biblical Support For *Creation Ex Nihilo*

We noted earlier that Professor May does not think that the text of the Bible demands belief in creation *ex nihilo* (p. 24). Unfortunately, he does little to defend this claim. While he makes passing reference to certain biblical passages that seem to hint at the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, he does not seriously interact with them. He focuses on patristic study (as his subtitle indicates) rather than on biblical exegesis. This turns out to be a weakness for May because, if properly done, sound biblical exegesis refutes the notion that creation out of nothing is a mere theological invention. For instance, Rom 4:17 (where God is said to call into being things that are not) and Heb 11:3 (where the visible world is not created from anything observable) are passages which May simply writes off as fitting in with other statements of hellenistic Judaism - statements that *seem* to affirm absolute creation out of nothing but are actually only asserting belief in world-formation.

One wonders if that is all there is to the matter. It seems that such assertions, given without any arguments whatsoever, can be rather misleading. Indeed, May gives the false impression that *creation ex nihilo* was nothing more than the invention of well-meaning Christian theologians who were trying to defend what they believed to be the biblical notions of God's absolute sovereignty, freedom, and omnipotence in the face of heretical gnostic doctrines. I believe that examining the relevant biblical passages more extensively will adequately show that the traditional teaching of *creation ex nihilo* has strong biblical grounds.

Walter Eichrodt expresses the implicit assumption that the OT makes regarding absolute creation: "The idea of the absolute beginning of the created world thus proves to be a logical expression of the total outlook of the priestly narrator."⁴⁷ For example, Isa 40:21, which refers back to Gen 1:1 but utilizes the parallel expression "from the foundation of the earth," is "a clear reference to an absolute beginning" and not an "arbitrary judgment," according to Eichrodt.⁴⁸ He considers the doctrine *creation ex nihilo* as being "incontestable"⁴⁹ - especially in light of the author's strict monotheism as well as his radical distinction between ancient cosmogonies, in which the gods emerged out of pre-existing matter, and his own. Eichrodt argues that "the ultimate aim of the [creation] narrative is the same as that of our formula of creation *ex nihilo*."⁵⁰ Although this formula does not occur in the OT, the object of God's creative activity is "heaven and earth and all that is in them"; so God's creation cannot be restricted to "the stars and things on earth" but must include "the entire cosmos."⁵¹ Claus Westermann agrees: Gen 1:1 does not refer to "the beginning of something, but simply The Beginning. *Everything* began with God."⁵²

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

Another OT scholar, R. K. Harrison, asserts that while *creation ex nihilo* was "too abstract for the [Hebrew] mind to entertain" and is not stated explicitly in Genesis 1, "it is certainly implicit in the narrative."⁵³ The reader is meant to understand that "the worlds were not fashioned from any pre-existing material, but out of nothing"; "prior" to God's creative activity, "there was thus no other kind of phenomenological existence."⁵⁴

In contrast to ancient cosmogonies, Genesis posits an absolute beginning. Elohim was not limited by chaos when creating (as in the Babylonian cosmogony) but is sovereign over the elements. Genesis 1 stands as an independent assertion, claiming that God created the entire cosmos. In fact, the very structure of Gen 1:1 argues for creation out of nothing. Grammatically and contextually, a very good case can be made for seeing Gen 1:1 as referring to absolute creation.⁵⁵ Consequently, Gen 1:1 should not be translated, "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland ...," as the NAB does. (This would mean that Ian Barbour's assertion that Genesis argues for "the creation of *order from chaos*" rather than from nothing⁵⁶ is misguided.)

Lending further support to *creation ex nihilo* in Scripture is that God (or Christ) is said to be the Creator or the ultimate Source of the totality of existing things. Although May leads one to believe that the biblical evidence for creation out of nothing is ambiguous, it is hard to deny the scope of biblical language: "from him ... are all things" (Rom 11:36); "through [Christ] are all things" (1 Cor 8:6); "God, who created all things" (Eph 3:9); "by him all things were created" (Col 1:16; cp. 20); "you created all things and because of your will they existed and were created" (Rev 4:11). The clear implication of Yahweh's title "the first and the last" (Isa 44:6) or "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8) is that he is the ultimate originator and only eternal being. Proverbs 8:22–26 states that before the depths were brought forth (i.e., most likely the "deep" of Gen 1:2), Wisdom was creating with God. Nothing else besides the Creator existed - and this would preclude any pre-existent stuff. Referring to creation, John 1:3 unambiguously states that all things - that is, "the material world" - came into being through the Word.⁵⁷ The implication is that all things (which would include pre-existent matter, if that were applicable to the creative process) exist through God's agent, who is the originator of everything.⁵⁸ So when Scripture speaks of God's creation, there is an all-embracing nature to it. Despite their lack of precise formulation of a doctrine of *creation ex nihilo*, the biblical writers have "a natural habit of speaking as comprehensively as possible about Yahweh's creative power."⁵⁹

In addition, the notion of *creation ex nihilo* is reinforced when Scripture declares the eternality and self-sufficiency of God in contrast to the finite created order (Ps 102:25–27; cp. Heb 1:10–12). The God "who called forth creation out of nothing has power also to reduce it to nothing again."⁶⁰ Implicit throughout Isaiah 40–48 is the supreme sovereignty and utter uniqueness of Yahweh in creation, besides whom there was no other god - or anything else - when he created: "I am the first and the last" (44:6; cp. 48:12); "I, the LORD, am the maker of all things" (44:24); "I am the LORD, and there is none else" (45:18; cp. 46:9).

Moreover, the Bible assumes that God's word *alone* is what brings the universe about - not simply God's word acting upon previously existing matter. Psalm 33 declares that it was by "the word of the Lord [**τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου**]" and "the breath of his mouth" that "the heavens were made" (vv. 6, 9).⁶¹

A passage that deserves significant attention is Heb 11:3, which declares, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen [**τὸ βλεπόμενον**] was not made [**κατηρτίσθαι**] out of what was visible [**μὴ ἐκ φαινόμενων**]." This text declares that the visible universe "was not made out of equally visible [pre-existent] raw material; it was called into being by divine power."⁶² Jaroslav Pelikan states that this passage, along with Rom 4:17, "explicitly" teaches creation out of nothing.⁶³ The word order of the phrase **μὴ ἐκ φαινόμενων** is common in Classical Greek and should be rendered "from things unseen."⁶⁴ The philosophical sense of **τὰ φαινόμενα** referred to sense experience.⁶⁵ The physical worlds (**τοὺς αἰῶνας**) are described as being that which is seen (**τὸ βλεπόμενον**); this is in contrast with that which is invisible - namely, the word of God.⁶⁶ Paul Ellingworth argues that the phrase **ῥῆματι Θεοῦ**, "the word of God," would "conflict" with any idea that the visible world was made out of materials in the invisible world. It is much more satisfactory to understand **τοὺς αἰῶνας** as referring to the visible world, and thus as synonymous with **τὸ βλεπόμενον**.⁶⁷ As C. F. D. Moule notes, "the reference seems to be to *creation ex nihilo*, the *visible* having come into being out of the *invisible*."⁶⁸ Commentator William Lane remarks that, although Heb 11:3 does not state *creation ex nihilo* in positive terms, but negatively, "it denies that the creative universe originated from primal material or anything observable."⁶⁹ Lane goes on to

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

assert that the writer's insistence that the universe was not brought into being from anything observable would seem to exclude any influence from Platonic or Philonic cosmology. It may, in fact, have been the writer's intention to correct a widespread tendency in hellenistic Judaism to read Gen 1 in the light of Plato's doctrine in the *Timaieus*.⁷⁰

So, contrary to May's assertion, Heb 11:3 states something that is quite distinct from Classical Greek concepts of creation.

In light of this discussion, it is a serious distortion to portray the doctrine of creation out of nothing as a post-biblical phenomenon, as does May, along with Ian Barbour. The biblical data indicate that God was ontologically prior to all that is, which is the basis for the doctrine *creation ex nihilo*. Just as the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly found within Scripture (despite the fact that Arianism later flourished) though it was not formulated until Tertullian's time, so the doctrine of creation out of nothing is biblical (despite the flourishing of Middle Platonist thought and its influence on Jewish and Christian thinkers) even though it was clearly articulated and expanded upon only in the latter part of the second century.

Moreover, one wonders what May would take as unambiguous evidence for creation out of nothing in Scripture (or in extra-biblical sources). It seems that he would not be satisfied with any formulation in a given text other than "creation out of [absolutely] nothing" or the like. But one can legitimately ask, "What does the *Alpha* in the divine title 'Alpha and Omega' really mean if not that God is the absolute Originator of all there is? What does the *all* in the clause 'by him all things were created' really mean if not that God created the totality of all that exists?"

VI. Concluding Remarks

We have taken note of the strong evidence for absolute creation in both Scripture and various Jewish and Christian writings, which attest to a broader theological context which often took creation *ex nihilo* for granted. So, to say that the biblical information about creation is ambiguous on the basis of the fact that several early church fathers held to world-formation is simply inaccurate. This reads back a Greek way of thinking into the OT text. To my mind, it seems doubtful that an un-hellenized Jewish student of the OT would have formulated something analogous to a Middle Platonist cosmology on his own. What is clear is that these church fathers were strongly influenced by (Middle-)Platonism, which held firmly to belief in eternal formless matter. Their belief in God as an artificer was not due to Scripture's ambiguity on the topic but because of the strength of the philosophical grid within which they operated.

May claims that "theologians who represent the orthodox line of clarification leading to the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* do not reveal any acquaintance with philosophical theories about the creation of the world out of nothing" (p. viii). But in light of the fact that they did steep themselves in Scripture, this factor provided a sufficient theological arsenal against heretical gnostic doctrines. If, as May asserts, the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing took shape *independently* of Basilides' influence, then this would all the more confirm that *creation ex nihilo* is grounded in Scripture.

Even though May's main thesis - that the doctrine of *creation ex nihilo* was *formulated* in the midst of controversy in the late second century - is correct, this would still leave untouched the issue of whether or not it is a biblical doctrine. Christian doctrines such as Christ's deity, the hypostatic union, and the Trinity were similarly forged in the fires of theological controversy. To assert then that this doctrine is not biblical simply because it has been formulated through the provocation of heresy does not follow. After all, it usually takes the heretic to create the theologian.⁷¹

By way of implication, we should note two things. First, our study has shown that although some noted theists (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr) have believed that theism is not incompatible with pre-existent matter, some contemporary religious thinkers deny the traditional notion of creation out of nothing in order to support their proclivity for process theology - like Peacocke and Barbour. Barbour, for instance, states that the process view stresses divine immanence - although it does not exclude transcendence.⁷² (Barbour diminishes the God of theism by declaring that he is "neither omnipotent nor powerless"; "God does not act directly"; "God

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

does not intervene sporadically from outside."⁷³) So, from an empirical and theological perspective, the finitude of the universe would be an argument against process theism since God cannot exist without the world. Consequently, Barbour leaves open the question of an oscillating universe⁷⁴ (as has the noted process theist Charles Hartshorne).

A second (and related) point is this: the scientific problems with an infinitely-oscillating universe (for which we have no basis in physics),⁷⁵ alongside the prevailing Big Bang model, and the additional factor of the universe's winding down toward an eventual "heat death," point toward a contingent universe. It seems quite credible to believe that the very contingency of the world begs for a self-existent and non-contingent explanation. If the universe began to exist, and if we accept the intuitively obvious metaphysical principle that "whatever begins to exist must have a cause,"⁷⁶ we are pointed in the direction of the biblical God who created out of nothing.

So, contrary to May and others, the doctrine of creation out of nothing was not simply created *ex nihilo* by post-biblical theologians of the second century to counteract gnostic ideas. We have good reason to believe that the doctrine of creation out of nothing is rooted in biblical passages indicating that God is the ontological Originator of all that exists.⁷⁷

References

¹ I. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (reprint; New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 384. Philosopher of Science E. McMullin states that the doctrine of creation out of nothing, "an act of absolute bringing to be," took "firm shape only in the first centuries of the Christian era, in part at least in response to the prevalent dualisms of the day that represented matter as evil, or at least, as resistant to God's action" ("Natural Science and Belief in a Creator," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology* [ed. R. Russell, W. Stoeger, and G. Coyne; Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1988] 56). McMullin is at least willing to concede that hints of *creation ex nihilo* can be found in Scripture (pointing to 2 Macc 7:28 and Rom 1:20). Anglican priest and physicist J. Polkinghorne sees 2 Macc 7:28 as the "earliest unequivocal statement of the idea of creation out of nothing although he believes Genesis 1 stresses at least the dependence of all upon the sovereign will of God for its existence," which is "certainly consonant with the central significance of *creation ex nihilo*" (*Reason and Reality* [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991] 72).

² Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion*, 384.

³ I. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (The Gifford Lectures 1989/1991, vol. 1; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) 144.

⁴ Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 129.

⁵ A. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 7879. Although God is transcendent, Peacocke strongly emphasizes the immanence of God and his continual creation (*creation continua*) within the world - but at the expense of initial creation: "The postulate of God as Creator of all-that-is is not, in its most profound form, a statement about what happened at a particular point in time. To speak of God as Creator is to postulate about a perennial or 'eternal' ... relation of God to the world" (*God and the New Biology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986] 95).

Barbour, Peacocke, and L. Gilkey (in his *Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in Light of Modern Knowledge* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959]) have used the term "continuing creation" to refer to God's continuing activity and providence. T. Peters urges that the motive for switching the meaning of creation from ultimate temporal beginning (which is what Thomas Aquinas took creation to mean although he did not think creation out of nothing could be known apart from revelation) to the process of change within the world is to "merge creation with preservation or providence," but this runs the risk of "a total elimination of any theological commitment to a temporal beginning" ("On Creating the Cosmos," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology*, 291. See also R. J. Russell's essay "Finite Creation Without a Beginning," in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature* [ed. R. J. Russell, et al.; Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1993]). Polkinghorne calls for greater discrimination between the two types of creation rather than combining them - a view which "sits

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

somewhat uneasily with the 'seventh day' of sabbath rest ... with its implication of the completed work of creation" (*Reason and Reality*, 73); see also Polkinghorne's discussion in *The Faith of a Physicist* (Princeton: University Press, 1994) 7376.

⁶ G. May, *Creation ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); originally published as *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978). Since I interact fairly frequently with May, all paginated references to his book will be in the text rather than footnoted.

⁷ Polkinghorne, *Faith of a Physicist*, 74.

⁸ Peters, "On Creating the Cosmos," 273-74. To avoid a deistic flavor of *creation ex nihilo*, the doctrine of *creation continua*, God's continued creative and sustaining power in the universe, must be added to give a fuller, biblical picture of God's creation. See Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* I,q.45, art. 2.

⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* 11.5.7.

¹⁰ Russell, "Finite Creation," 309.

¹¹ J. D. Barrow and J. Silk, *The Left Hand of Creation: The Origin and Evolution of the Expanding Universe* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 38.

¹² For a discussion of the relationship of theism and the Big Bang theory, see W. L. Craig and Q. Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

¹³ P. E. Hughes, "The Doctrine of Creation in Hebrews" 11:3, *BTB* 2 (1972) 76. Hughes asserts that "nothing" or "non-existent" entities must be qualified. Created things were made according to certain pre-existent forms or archetypes (in the mind of God) - although not shaped out of pre-existing matter (p. 76).

¹⁴ P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 443.

¹⁵ Theophilus, *Autolytus* 2.4; cf. Peters, "On Creating the Cosmos," 278.

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *AH* 3.10.3; cf. 2.10.4.

¹⁷ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.7.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* 12.7.

¹⁹ This period extended from the second half of the first century BC until the first half of the third century AD. It included thinkers like Plutarch (AD 45/125), Albinus (second century AD), Apuleius (b. ca. 125), and Atticus (latter half of the second century).

²⁰ *Timaeus* 28C:

²¹ J. Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100/600)* (Chicago: University Press, 1971) 35. See Clements *Stromata* 5.14; 5.89.5-6, where he shows acceptance of the Middle-Platonic belief that God created using pre-existent matter.

²² Justin, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks* 29. (See also his *Apology* 1.59.)

²³ *Ibid.*, 30. However, alluding to Gen 1:2, Prov 8:24 clearly negates the idea of a pre-existent deep before God created ("when there were no oceans"). G. M. Landes, "Creation Tradition in Proverbs 8:22-31 and Genesis 1," in *A Light Unto My Path* (FS Jacob B. Meyers) (ed. H. Bream, et al.; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974) 286.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

²⁴ J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 235; cf. *De hominis opificio* 2.3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 257-58.

²⁹ *The Eternity of the World* 5.

³⁰ *On Dreams* 1.76. For a helpful discussion on Philo's view of creation, see R. Sorabji, *Time Creation and the Continuum* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) 20-39. Sorabji concludes on the basis of Philo's *de Providentia* 1 and 2 that Philo implies that the universe - including its matter - had a beginning; he admits, however, that Philo in a few minor passages is not always consistent (p. 208).

³¹ *Timaeus* 50D (matter as "formless and free").

³² *Physics* 191a,10 ("the formless before receiving form").

³³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 281n.

³⁴ Some ambiguity has existed among Jewish thinkers regarding the nature of creation. As late as the third century, Palestinian teacher Rabbi Johanan stated that God took two coils - one of fire and the other of snow - wove them together, and created the world (*Genesis Rabbah* 10:3). The Jewish thinker Gersonides (1288-1344) adopted the Platonic view of Gods imposing form on eternally pre-existent matter - a minority view by this time. See L. Jacobs, "Jewish Cosmology," in *Ancient Cosmologies* (ed. C. Blacker and M. Loewe; London: Allen & Unwin, 1975) 72, 7576.

³⁵ Jacobs, "Jewish Cosmology," 66.

³⁶ I am grateful to D.A. Carson for this point.

³⁷ Jacobs, "Jewish Cosmology," 67.

³⁸ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 142n.

³⁹ C. Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 36.

⁴⁰ For a different perspective, see J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 30715. See also Goldstein's "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation ex Nihilo," *JJS* 35 (1984) 127-35.

⁴¹ Unformed space/void was formed by God (Isa 45:7) as were darkness (Isa 45:7), water (Ps 148:45), wind (Amos 4:13), and the depths (Prov 8:24). J. Neusner, *Confronting Creation* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) 41-42.

⁴² *Shepherd of Hermas*, V. 1.6: **ἀέρας ἐκ τῆς οὐρανόθεν καὶ ὕδατος ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ οὐρανόθεν καὶ θαλάσσης ἐκ τῆς οὐρανόθεν καὶ θαλάσσης.**

⁴³ D. Carroll, "Creation," in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. J. Komanchak, et al.; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 249.

⁴⁴ J. Charlesworth, "Odes of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J. Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) 2:726-27.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

⁴⁵ F. J. Murphy, *The Structure and Meaning of Second Baruch* (SBLDS 78; Atlanta: Scholars, 1985) 43.

⁴⁶ May (22n) and others (like W. Bousset) view this section (12) of the Constitutions as being a later Christian interpolation, but J. Charlesworth, among others, does not think so ("Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:690n). At least the lack of consensus should preclude us from hastily dismissing it.

⁴⁷ W. Eichrodt, "In the Beginning: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the First Word of the Bible," in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. B. W. Anderson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁰ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 2:101.

⁵¹ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:102. The fact that "heaven and earth" is a merism signifying "the totality of cosmic phenomena" points us toward an absolute beginning of the universe - including matter (N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* [JPS Torah Commentary; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989] 5). R. K. Harrison affirms that the phrase the heavens and the earth is a merism which indicates totality, not simply two antonymic elements. See Harrison, Creation, in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (5 vols.; ed. M. C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 1.1022.

⁵² C. Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 7.

⁵³ Harrison, Creation, 1023.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See J. Sailhamer's discussion in "Genesis" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (ed. F. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 21-23n. See also U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part 1* (reprint; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) 20. Cassuto argues that beginning with v. 2, the focus changes from the cosmos to creations relationship to humanity, stressing the themes of "land" and "blessing," which prevail throughout the Pentateuch.

⁵⁶ Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 130.

⁵⁷ Although R. Brown wrongly asserts that John 1:18 "does not necessarily have the same theology as the Gospel" (see D. A. Carson's discussion on how John's prologue actually introduces the gospels major themes: *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 111-12), Brown makes plain that the word **ἐγένετο** (come into being) is used consistently to describe creation in the Septuagint in Genesis 1 (R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* [AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966] 6.)

⁵⁸ For a survey of the biblical data regarding creation, see K. H. Schelkle, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1971) 361.

⁵⁹ Eichrodt, *Theology*, 2:102.

⁶⁰ C.F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 122.

⁶¹ God's creation by divine fiat is also reflected in 2 Esdr 6:38: "I said, O Lord, You have indeed spoken from the beginning of creation; on the first day You said: 'Let heaven and earth be made,' and Your word accomplished the work."

⁶² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 280.

The Mormon Creationist Viewpoint

⁶³ J. Pelikan, "Creation and Causality in the History of Christian Thought," in *Evolution After Darwin*, vol. 3 (ed. S. Tax and C. Callender; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960) 34.

⁶⁴ P. Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 569.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 571.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 568.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 569. Ellingworth indicates that the two halves of the verse are parallel in meaning and form a chiasmus:

(1) κατατίθεσθε (1') γεγονέναι
(2) τοῖς ἀστέρι (2') τὸ βλάστησεν
(3) ῥήματι Θεοῦ (3') μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων

⁶⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (reprint; Cambridge: University Press, 1968) 168. Moule adds, however, that the order of the negative **οὐ** before the preposition **ἐκ**, from or out of, is somewhat awkward grammatically.

⁶⁹ W. L. Lane, *Hebrews* (WBC; 2 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1991) 2.332.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Without giving any substantial evidence for his assertion, H. Attridge asserts that "a Platonic cosmogonic model" lies behind the formulation of this verse (*Epistle to the Hebrews* [Her; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989] 316).

⁷¹ Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, 44.

⁷² Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 146.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁵ Craig, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, 56. Barrow and Silk consider the oscillating universe model to be in the realm of "science fiction" (*The Left Hand of Creation*, 72).

⁷⁶ For a defense of this principle, see W. L. Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979); "Creation and Big Bang Cosmology" and "A Response to Grünbaum on Creation and Big Bang Cosmology" in *Philosophia Naturalis* 31 (1994) 217-24, 237-49. Arguments asserting that vacuum fluctuations in the quantum world are an example of something's coming into existence out of nothing are confused. Physicist J. Polkinghorne makes clear that "the vacuum in quantum theory is a humming hive of activity" - not absolutely nothing (*One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* [Princeton: University Press, 1986] 67): "Only by the greatest abuse of language could such an active and structured medium [i.e., the quantum vacuum] be called nihil (for in quantum theory, when there is 'nothing' there, it does not mean that nothing is happening)" (Polkinghorne, *Faith of a Physicist*, 75). Moreover, such assertions confuse unpredictability, which is certainly the case in the quantum world, with uncausedness. Also, it is simply unwise to make an extrapolation from the quirky micro-world of quantum physics to the macro-world of mountains, oceans, and galaxies (Barrow and Silk, *The Left Hand of Creation*, 59).

⁷⁷ Thanks to D. A. Carson and Bill Craig for their suggestions.

Mormon Creationism

<http://www.dhbailey.com/papers/dhb-creationism.pdf>

As for the Bible account of the creation we may say that the Lord gave it to Moses, or rather Moses obtained the history and traditions of the fathers, and from these picked out what he considered necessary, and that account has been handed down from age to age, and we have got it, no matter whether it is correct or not, and whether the Lord found the earth empty and void, whether he made it out of nothing or out of the rude elements; or whether he made it in six days or in as many millions of years, is and will remain a matter of speculation in the minds of men unless he give revelation on the subject. [Journal of Discourses, (Liverpool Publishers, 1873) 15: 127.]

The opening chapters of Genesis, and scriptures related thereto, were never in-tended as a textbook of geology, archaeology, earth-science, or man-science. Holy Scripture will endure, while the conceptions of men change with new discoveries. We do not show reverence for the scriptures when we misapply them through faulty interpretation. [James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," Tabernacle address, August 9, 1931, published in pamphlet form by LDS Church.]