

## CREATION OUT OF NOTHING?

### EDITORIAL

Did God create the universe out of nothing? How important is it to get this right? Wrong ideas endanger our spiritual life. The New Church grows with the actual removal of false ideas (*True Christian Religion* 784). In the recent debate about Intelligent Design vs. Creationism, the New Church has the luxury of just explaining how creation took place. By correcting this “top-most” heresy of creation out of nothing, a whole string of other false ideas may go with it.

First, what are the wrong ideas? Jewish cosmogony either has the universe always existing (modern steady-state theory) surrounded by a vast ocean, or God, being “nothing, created the world from Himself in order to become God and thus something” (Krochmal), or an “infinite number of unique created nothings fulfilling themselves by giving content to God’s essence”(Rosenzweig). Christians just accept “Fiat” “and it was so” ex nihilo creation. Muslim cosmogony has Allah saying “Kun” or Be, and the universe “was” ex nihilo. In Hindu cosmogony Brahman created the universe out of nothing by opening his eyes, then his Purush or breath yielded a golden egg along with Prajapati, the “next” creator who then created the universe from his own body.

What is the truth? The truth matters because God’s existence comes together with a belief in Creation. The truth replacing all of the above is that God created the finite “universe out of substances emanating from Him” (*True Christian Religion* 33). “The Lord from Eternity, who is Jehovah, created the universe and all things of it from Himself, and not from nothing” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 282).

Why does it matter? It matters, because creation out of nothing makes the existence of evil inexcusable. God has no justification for including the serpent. “Why did not Jehovah in the first place

restrain man from eating of the tree, since He was present and saw the consequences? And why did He not hurl the serpent into Hades before he had persuaded them?" (*True Christian Religion* 469). However, this is not the issue: it is freedom of choice (ibid). The serpent means our five senses, the Tree of Knowledge our questioning whether the truth is really so. (*Arcana Coelestia* 192). The wrong interpretation of this story places evil in the world as a potential from creation, thus by God's will. Adam failed the test of faith by eating the Tree of Knowledge, and all people stand condemned by Adam's "original sin." The Writings ask, "If all are "condemned for one man's fault...can this be squared with Divine justice?" (*True Christian Religion* 469). They counter: hereditary evil is "not derived from the first parents or Adam and Eve, as is believed in the church at this day, and that all are therefore condemned" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4317, *Brief Exposition* 111). Instead "Man himself is the origin of evil; not that this origin was planted in man from creation but, by turning away from God, he planted it in himself" (*Conjugal Love* 444:4). We do this when we in effect say, "Unless I can prove it by my own experience, I will not believe it" (Cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 235, 2588, et al).

Thus from creation, there was no evil. Evil was not part of creation, instead human beings brought it into existence. Instead of original sin, there was the "origin of evil" and inherited inclinations to evils. We can reject the dogma that the Father would destroy the human race because of original sin, but that Christ as the Second Person came to "die for our sins" to thereby remove "the burden of sin" from humans. We can reject the idea that the human race stands condemned by original sin, and that salvation comes to those who merely believe Christ died for us on the Cross, or that the crucifixion was "redemption itself" (*True Christian Religion* 132). Instead, this last is the "fundamental error of the Christian Church" (ibid). By accepting that

the “passion of the cross was redemption itself, have sprung ...the fallacy that those upon whom that faith has been bestowed, are at the same time regenerated without any cooperation on their part; and even that they have thus been absolved from the condemnation” (*True Christian Religion* 581). Such a faith abolishes religion, or the need to live by the commandments (*Divine Providence* 340:2). However the Lord said, “He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me” (John 14: 21).

The truth is that God the Creator Himself made His Advent on earth, by “sending Himself into the world” by taking on the Human, called “the Son of God” (*True Christian Religion* 92). The hells attacked Him through the human heredity of this weak human. We read, “The diversion of iniquities and evils to Himself can never come about except through a hereditary channel.” In other words, there was no other way to accomplish the Advent than for the Lord to “bear the iniquities and evils of the human race” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1573:7). “Bearing the sins of the human race” however does not mean to remove them from man, but to “endure grievous temptations; and to suffer Himself to be treated as the Word had been treated” (*Lord* 15). By suffering and overcoming temptations, the Lord then “fights on behalf of...every individual person... against the hells; for no one is able by himself to fight against them” (*Arcana Coelestia* 9937).

Now the Lord, having once conquered all evils in Himself, always conquers them in us (*Arcana Coelestia* 9718, 9715, 8273) when we obey His commandments and overcome our own temptations. The Lord came on earth to put Himself into the power of doing just that on the lowest natural level, (*Apocalypse Explained* 1087, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 221, *True Christian Religion* 581, 640) thus to save “those He could not save before” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3061). He could not save all people prior to

the Advent because the human race had cast itself into darkness by removing itself so far out of range of angelic visitation that heaven's light could no longer be provided (*Arcana Coelestia* 3195, 2776, 4180). The gradual accumulation of hereditary evil caused this removal. For hereditary evil tendencies, if not removed by repentance, accumulate from parents and ancestors, generation by generation to the point of destroying the understanding of truth and will of good (*Arcana Coelestia* 3701). The Lord then took on these very inclinations or infirmities (*Arcana Coelestia* 2795), and overcame the hells by these means.

We see therefore the chain of false ideas removed: creation out of nothing, links to evil existing from creation, links to original sin, links to total condemnation, links to Christ dying for us on the cross, links to instant salvation by faith in Christ's passion, links to absolution from evils of life. Replacing these we have: creation out of God by discrete degrees, which links to all creation being good, links to human free will in spiritual things, links to the origin of evil imposed by man on himself, links to the accumulation of hereditary evil tendencies which destroy understanding truth, links to the Lord "bearing" this human heredity by "suffering" from our sins, links to conquering the hells, links to us all regenerated by the same method, in His Name.

There remains the problem of Pantheism: if God made the universe out of Himself, is the Universe God? "Because God alone is substance in itself, [the] origin of [all] things is from no other source. But they dare not assert it, fearing that they might end up thinking that the created universe, being from God, is God, or that nature exists from itself" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 283). The consequence would be the "worship of nature" which leads "automatically to atheism" (*True Christian Religion* 771). The answer therefore is, "Although God created the universe and all its constituents out of Himself, still there is not the least

particle in the created universe that is God” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 283).

Is God immanent in nature? Is there a “divine spark” in all of us? Pantheism is even suggested in Scripture: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). We sing, “The myriad voices of creation hail Thee.” (*Liturgy Hymn #847*) However, we know it means all creation returning thanks to its Creator. Therefore, the question remains how God makes everything out of Himself, without pantheism as a result.

The answer is that God is not a simple substance, or Prime Mover as Aristotle thought. God is Infinite: “In God-Man, infinite things are one, distinctly.” Alternatively, translated differently: “The infinite elements in the human God are, in a distinct combination, one” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 17). This “infinity” moves beyond such limited ideas as “many” and “all,” (Ibid.) and think of God as “an infinite perfection” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 18). This perfection in God includes three “levels of height,” called Love itself, Wisdom itself, and Useful endeavor itself (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 239), yielding the Gospel terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as the Son of God, and the Son of Man. All of these terms refer to the One Person of the Risen Lord God Jesus Christ, who reigns for ages of ages (*True Christian Religion* 791).

The Infinite Creator being three levels of height, i.e. discrete degrees, also creates all things by means of discrete degrees. The spiritual sun is the last border of the Infinite: “There and thence is the first of the finite process, and its progress reaches even to the outmost of the world's nature” (*True Christian Religion* 29). In other words, beyond the spiritual sun, finite creation has distinct “cut-offs” all the way down to planets. There is consequently a whole host of distinctions in the created universe. We are warned directly that mixing up or ignoring

these degrees result in “enormous falsities being declared as the truth itself” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 187). The “divine spark” or “Divine inhering in man” is one such enormous falsity, needing correction: “What is essentially divine cannot be appropriated to any man, for in that case man would be God” (*Divine Providence* 293). “The finite has nothing of the Divine in itself, there is in man or angel nothing of this nature, not even the most minute, as his own” (*Divine Providence* 57). In addition, “The substances and materials of the earth have in them nothing of the Divine in itself...they are bereft of everything that is Divine in itself” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 305).

Instead, God flows in with love, life and truth, and we humans, several separate levels down the ladder, receive it. Then “influx is according to reception” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5144, *Conjugal Love* 352, *Interaction Soul Body* 2, 13). We might put it; the sunlight is according to the flower. The form of the receiving vessel, or “the course of formation taken” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 72), determines the quality of what flows in. For the Lord’s life flows “in and into man, but not through him” (*True Christian Religion* 154). God does not operate through us, nor is He in our words and actions. We are not determined by God’s influx, but the other way around. Just as a toaster and a shaver act completely differently from the identical electricity, so everyone acts individually on their own from God’s inflowing life. Thus if there were a “divine spark” in us, we would be incinerated by it. So much for the “divine spark.”

Here we see also, why God is called “angry.” The Lord’s love is received by an angry man as anger. “God’s anger” is thus man’s anger against God! (*Arcana Coelestia* 3605.4 1838, 1861, 2706). Consequently, only humans are at fault if they are not saved. “The Lord is Good, evil cannot flow from Him but good can be turned into evil by the recipient subject [thus] into the nature of its own form. Hence it follows that man is in fault if he is not saved” (*Divine Providence* 327).

The universe being discontinuous, with contiguous breaks in it, falls into a “consecutive order.” By virtue of each break, the creative activity becomes “more general, and so grosser and more obscure, and more sluggish, and so more responsive and frigid” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7270:3). Finally, there are “substances at rest, like earth in the ground” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 302) where all influx from God ceases. However, they “retain within them, from the atmospheres from which they originated, an effort and conatus [endeavor] to bring forth uses” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 303). This effort to return to the Source is exemplified in the procreative principle of germination.

These discrete degrees of creation account for all stars and galaxies, since they all represent the spiritual sun. The “big bang” could well describe how the Infinite created the Finite, or maybe another theory will become popular. In any event, creation was not a proceeding from the Infinite, which would be pantheism and a “contradiction.” Instead “the finite can be produced from the infinite, [which] is a creating, not a proceeding” (*Divine Providence* 219).

The universe amazingly portrayed on so many TV programs, by both Hubble shots and cinematronics, commences below the spiritual sun. It therefore contains all the discrete degrees of the heavens in its structure. Because “discrete degrees” are discontinuous levels, like quantum gaps, or dimensions, they are part of the fabric of the universe. There are at least twelve discrete degrees mentioned in the Writings: there are 3 in the Lord Himself, next the spiritual sun is number 4, the two radiant halos around that sun are 5 and 6, the six spiritual atmospheres which contain the three heavens and levels of our soul, being present also within and above nature, are 7,8,9, with 10, 11 and 12, the lowest three of these six spiritual atmospheres being coter-minous with and controlling the three natural atmospheres (e.g. gravity, electro-magnetism and air), which are thus also 10, 11 and 12. These “discrete degrees” bridge all gaps, starting

from the spiritual sun down to the “natural sun which is far below the spiritual” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 153). The natural sun of course includes all stars. These gaps are “three in the spiritual world, and three corresponding to these in the natural world, and three more in the inert substances of which the terrestrial globe is composed” (*True Christian Religion* 33). These degrees jostle into a total of 12 or so.

That closely matches one recent hypothesis of Michio Kaku of “ten or eleven dimensions” or “modular functions,” part of his superstring theory of hyperspace.<sup>1</sup> “Dimension” is just a lisp for “discrete degree.” Terms will differ. If our mind boggles, it may just be because the universe bends!

It is satisfying to consider that God created all the elements of Mendeleev’s atomic chart by withdrawing what is divine and infinite from all that proceeded from Him, beyond the spiritual sun. God can withdraw what is His own from what proceeds from Him. THAT is the trick to creation! That withdrawal also ends up as an uplifting force or elevation into heaven. We witness the consequences of this elevating force on the discrete degrees within nature, via germination, in what is known as evolution. This knowledge of creation helps to establish the New Church by accepting that we worship God the Creator and the Lord the Redeemer, in One Person. “That same God is Jesus Christ, who is Jehovah the Lord, the Creator from eternity, the Redeemer in time, and the Regenerator for eternity to come. Thus He is at once Father, Son and Holy Spirit; this is the Gospel to be preached” (*True Christian Religion* 26).

<sup>1</sup> *Hyperspace*, Michio Kaku, *A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps And The 10th Dimension*. Oxford University Press, 1994.