

IS CREATION ETERNAL?

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[The author examines the integral relationship between the Trinity and creation based on the theology of St. Bonaventure. Divine action is considered not as episodic intervention but within the context of relationship. Because creation is a finite expression of the infinite Word of God, it is intrinsically related to the primacy of Christ. An eternal creation rests on God's eternal resolve to love a finite order, and Christ is first in God's intention to love. It is argued that the eternal act of creation lies in the eternal nature of God's love.]

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER or not creation is eternal is certainly not a new one. From earliest times, the idea of an eternal creation was favored by pagan philosophers and mystics alike. The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was formulated in the second century to warrant against such an idea and to affirm God's transcendence. The question arises anew today in light of the current scientific world view, marked by evolution, which has impelled new models of divine action to emerge. While contemporary models of divine action address the question "how" God creates, less attention is directed to the question "why" God creates. Yet the philosophical enigma prevails, "why something and not nothing?" Recently, a collection of essays by theologians and scientists explored creation as a work of love, thus pointing to divine action as kenosis or God's self-emptying.¹ The resurgence of kenotic theology has been helpful in striving to reformulate divine action in an evolutionary world. Kenotic theology basically maintains that God, who is love, completely shares himself and thus takes a risk in creating, becoming vulnerable to that which is brought into being.

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¹ *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). The classic kenotic text in the New Testament is Philippians 2:1–11, referring to Christ who "emptied (*ekenōsen*) himself, taking the form of a servant."

It is precisely the relational nature of God as love that begs the question whether or not creation is eternal, since love implies a commitment to the other. Emphasis on divine love seems to lie behind process theology's picture of a God who in A. N. Whitehead's moving phrase, is a "fellow sufferer who understands," and who acts only through the power of persuasion.² Whitehead held that God and the world have always coexisted, and that God creates by working with what exists.³ An eternal creation for Whitehead rests on God's social and thus relational nature, an idea consistent with kenotic theology. Conversely, classical theology maintains an emphasis on divine transcendence whereby God's invulnerability is such that there is no reciprocal effect of creatures upon the divine nature.⁴ A classical understanding of God with an emphasis on divine *esse* corresponds to an understanding of divine action that is episodic. God acts in discrete events as an "actor," for example, as portrayed in the image of the potter and the clay. Divine action of the episodic type means that God acts according to divine will and power. Thomas Aquinas, for example, believed that God does not create because God is love but rather creation is a radically free act of the divine will. The difference between a classical understanding of God and the more recent kenotic theologies, I believe, is a metaphysical one. Classical theology emphasizes a substantive view of God based on divine *esse* whereas kenotic theology maintains that God's *ontos* is love; thus, God's nature is essentially relational.

Using Bonaventure's theology, I argue that divine action occurs within the context of relationship, grounded in the trinitarian relationships of the Father, Son and Spirit. Based on the self-diffusive nature of the Father to express himself in the Son/Word, I maintain that creation is always a finite expression of the infinite Word of God. Since the nature of the Father's self-expression cannot be considered apart from the Father's love for the Son, I suggest that creation is an eternal act because it is grounded in the primacy of Christ who is the object of the Father's eternal love. Just as Christ is first in God's intention to love, so too creation eternally expresses the Father's love for the Son. Based on trinitarian relationships, it is suggested that the eternal act of creation lies in the eternal nature of God's love.

CREATION EX NIHILO

The image of a transcendent God who works omnipotently was emphasized in the early Church in view of pantheistic ideas popular among pagan

² Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," in *Work of Love* 92.

³ Ian Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View" *ibid.* 16.

⁴ Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action" *ibid.* 92.

philosophies and cultic religions. Early Christianity was intensely preoccupied with drawing doctrinal lines over and against such ideas. The doctrine of *ex nihilo*, creation “out of nothing,” was formulated in the second century A.D. and emerged because of the early Church’s battle against Marcionism and Gnostic dualism, both of which proposed the formation of the material universe by a demiurge.⁵ Creation “out of nothing” had the merit of excluding both the dualistic idea that matter is eternal, intractable and probably unredeemable, and the pantheistic idea that everything is divine, emanating from the divine Being itself. The doctrine of *ex nihilo* was particularly favored in the Christian tradition compared to the Jewish or Muslim traditions. While Jewish writers said that *creatio ex nihilo* was the preferred view, it was not a compulsory doctrine. The main emphasis was on seeing one’s life in the light of *Torah* whereby God creates, commands, appoints, bestows value and pledges his protection. To believe in God as Creator was to trust and to go by all the things he has said-and-done.⁶

Creation *ex nihilo* was a useful formula for maintaining the extreme symmetry of the relation between the world and God, both God’s absolute existence and transcendent distinctiveness from the world, and at the same time the world’s total dependence upon God.⁷ The term *ex nihilo* underscored the idea that God creates a world truly distinct from Godself. Both Athanasius and Arius in the fourth century, for example, maintained a clear doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. They both held to a “complete contrast between God and created order, between the uncreated and self-subsistent, and that which is created out of nothing by the will of God.”⁸

⁵ According to Sjoerd L. Bonting, “the concept of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) arose in the battle of the early church against Marcionism and Gnostic dualism, both of which proposed the formation of the material universe by a demiurge. The new concept was first expounded by Theophilus of Antioch (c. 185) and later by Augustine, and it was thereafter almost universally accepted in the church, although it was not included in the ancient creeds. It was formulated dogmatically at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and reaffirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870. It was also accepted by Luther and Calvin” (Bonting, “Chaos Theology: A New Approach to the Science-Theology Dialogue,” *Zygon* 34 [June 1999] 324–26); Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 65–96; see also, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993; orig. ed. 1985) 74 who writes: “The formula *creatio ex nihilo* is an exclusive formula. The word *nihil* is a limit concept: out of nothing—that is to say out of pure nothingness. The preposition ‘out of’ does not point to any pre-given thing; it excludes matter of any kind whatsoever.”

⁶ Don Cupitt, *Creation Out of Nothing* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 6–7.

⁷ Ibid. 8.

⁸ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (New York: Oxford University, 1981) 76.

For Arius, the problem posed by the unbridgeable gulf between God and the world impelled him to consign the Word to the created order that led to the famous Arian controversy. Athanasius and Orthodox theology in general consigned the Word to the realm of the divine. As Andrew Louth notes, "the clear assertion of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* which, from Athanasius onwards becomes an acceptable premise in patristic theology, has disclosed an ontological gulf between God and creature and, *a fortiori*, between God and the soul."⁹ For Athanasius the gulf could be bridged only by the Incarnation in which the soul could be divinized through condescension of the Word to humanity. Of course *how* the Word became flesh posed a dilemma for early theologians since "God was by definition immutable, omnipotent, and omniscient."¹⁰ The term *kenosis* was used to describe the Incarnation based on the use of the verb *kenōō* in Philippians 2:7: "he emptied himself."¹¹ Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) described kenosis of the Word, taking flesh and incurring for himself all the limitations of fleshly life, *without* any loss of divine characteristics. While patristic theologians maintained a coincidence of divine immutability and self-emptying, Lutheran theologians in the 19th century described the Incarnation in terms of divine self-limitation, although such theology incurred its own difficulties.¹²

Contemporary kenotic theologians are revisiting kenotic theology less in terms of its Christological formula than in a trinitarian understanding of God whereby God empties himself to make room for another.¹³ Kenotic

⁹ Louth, *Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition* 78.

¹⁰ Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in *Work of Love* 195. For a discussion of the "classical" divine attributes in the patristic period, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2000) esp. chap. 5.

¹¹ Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations," in *Work of Love* 193–94.

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, "God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *Work of Love* 139; Keith Ward, "Cosmos and Kenosis" *ibid.* 153; Coakley, "Kenosis: Theological Meanings and Gender Connotations" *ibid.* 197. Both Moltmann and Coakley discuss the problems of Lutheran kenotic theology, especially as Gottfried Thomasius taught that certain features of divinity were compromised or relinquished in the Incarnation.

¹³ There are several ways to understand this idea: God could either empty himself of his divine riches and thus make space for another, as Philippians 2:1–11 suggests, or he could withdraw into himself in order to go out of himself. This latter notion of *Zimzum*, described by the Jewish scholar Isaac Luria, means that the existence of a world outside God is made possible by an inversion of God. The Creator is not an "unmoved mover" of the universe. Rather, creation is preceded by this self-movement on God's part which allows creation the space for its own being. See Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 87. Moltmann's interpretation of *Zimzum* has received critical reviews. See, for example, Alan J. Torrance, "Creatio ex Nihilo

theology does not deny creation *ex nihilo* but neither does it emphasize it. An understanding of God as kenotic love gives rise to a view of divine action that is relational. God could not share love in a finite way if he were not infinitely communicative within himself. God, therefore, acts not as an actor but as a lover in relationship. Love not only indicates to us what God is but who God is for us. Since love can never be isolated or autonomous without in some way sharing itself, it will be argued here that love is the basis of divine action because it is the basis of the Trinity.

TRINITY AND CREATION

The question of divine action is the question of the divine itself. When we speak of God's action, what kind of God are we speaking of? Do we believe that the God of Jesus Christ is a triune God—Father, Son and Spirit—and that the Trinity is fully expressed in Christ? Or do we believe that God is essential Being (*esse*) from which is derived the three divine persons of the Trinity? It is not unreasonable to say that the model of Trinity one assumes in describing divine action makes a difference. In her book *God for Us*, Catherine LaCugna described various models of the Trinity in the Christian tradition.¹⁴ The model formulated by Augustine and highlighted by Thomas Aquinas places an emphasis on the unity of divine Being (*esse*) from which is derived the three divine persons of the Trinity. The Trinity is not divine Being *per se* but is subsistent of divine Being. According to this model, God acts as a unity of divine essence and not as a Trinity of persons.¹⁵ This model differs from the Cappadocian model of Trinity with its emphasis on divine persons rather than divine Being. The Father, who is unoriginate, is the fountain fullness of goodness and the source of the other two divine persons. In this model, the Trinity

and the Spatio-Temporal Dimensions, with special reference to Jürgen Moltmann and D. C. Williams," in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970) 91; Ron Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal," *Christian Scholar's Review* 32 (Fall 2002) 49–72.

¹⁴ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 53–79, 81–109. LaCugna basically described the Augustinian and Cappadocian traditions of trinitarian theology.

¹⁵ LaCugna pointed out the difficulties of Aquinas's trinitarian theology among which are the separation of *theologia* from *oikonomia* and the priority of the one divine essence over the Trinity of persons which defeats the biblical, liturgical, and creedal way of speaking about God as the Father who comes to us in Christ and the Spirit. Following the lead of Yves Congar and M.-D. Chenu she writes that "Thomas' theology of creation as an act of the divine essence defunctionalizes the divine persons" (LaCugna, *God For Us* 145).

is not derived from divine Being but is Being itself. As John Zizioulas has indicated, Being is grounded in divine personhood.¹⁶

While the style of trinitarian thought in the West was primarily Augustinian, the Victorine School of the twelfth century followed an approach that differed markedly from that of Augustine. It is above all in Richard of St. Victor that a new and original style of trinitarian reflection developed based on the nature of love. Charity, according to Richard, which is the supreme form of the good, is the basis for showing the necessity of a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Since charity necessarily involves a relation to another, there can be no charity where there is no plurality. Charity must be in proportion to the good that is loved. The perfect communication of love, according to Richard, must involved no less than three persons.¹⁷ Zachary Hayes summarizes his position as follows:

If there were only one person in God, then a perfect self-communication would not be possible at all; for no creature could sustain such a communication. So, there must be at least two persons in God; there must be a perfectly lovable other. But if there were only two, then there could only be their love for one another; and this would not be the fullness of love. For if love by nature involves a relation to another, the highest perfection of love demands that each of the two persons in love share that love with yet another. Hence, Richard argues that there must be in God not only a *dilectum* but a *condilectum* as well. *Condilectio* is found where a third is loved by two in harmony.¹⁸

Richard's theology was extremely influential on Bonaventure who combined with it the Dionysian notion of self-diffusive goodness to form a trinitarian theology of a communion of persons-in-love. The basis of the Trinity for Bonaventure resides not in *substance* but in the *person* of the Father. The Father, he writes, is without origin (*innascibilis*) and thus the fountain fullness (*fontalis plenitudo*) of goodness; thus, the Father is primal and self-diffusive.¹⁹ It is the *person* of the Father as self-communicative (or

¹⁶ Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas has interpreted Cappadocian trinitarian theology according to the ontology of personhood. While his interpretation has been criticized (see, for example, L. Turcescu, "Person" versus "Individual," and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa," *Modern Theology* 18 [2002] 527–39), it is highly insightful and offers a basis to interpret Bonaventure's trinitarian theology. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985); Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 363–71.

¹⁷ See Zachary Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, vol. 3, *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. George Marcil (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1979) 15–16.

¹⁸ Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 16–17.

¹⁹ Bonaventure I *Sentence* (*Sent.*) d. 27, p.1, a. un., q. 2, ad 3 (I, 470). The critical edition of Bonaventure's works is the *Opera omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaven-

ex-static) love [love being the highest form of the good] who communicates [him]self in a personal way to one other, the Son. The love between the Father and Son is expressed in the person of the Spirit. The Trinity, therefore, is a communion of persons-in-love. The Son is that person eternally generated by the Father's self-diffusive goodness (*per modum naturae*) and, as such, is the total personal expression of the Father as Word, and ultimate likeness to the Father as Image.²⁰ The Son/Word is both generated by the Father and together with Father generates the Spirit who is that eternal bond of love between the Father and Son. While the Son is generated by the nature of the Father's goodness to express itself, the Spirit is generated by the will of the Father (*per modum voluntatis*). Within the trinitarian relationships, therefore, there is both the necessity of self-expression (the Son/Word) and the freedom of self-expression (the Spirit). Necessity and freedom are grounded in the person of the Father as self-communicative love.

The primacy of the person of the Father is the basis of the Trinity for Bonaventure. The Trinity of persons is not derivative of divine essence [as if divine essence supercedes the Trinity]. Rather, Trinity *is* divine essence. Bonaventure describes the divine essence as a Trinity of *persons* by identifying *esse*, being, with the persons of the Trinity, that is, personhood is directly related to ontology. Following the lead of Zizioulas,²¹ we can say that [Divine] personhood is not a quality added on to "being" but is constitutive of "being" itself.²² The ground of being is the person of the Father whose relational nature as self-communicative love is expressed in the Son. The person of the Father is not derived from a substantive being; rather the

turae, 10 vols. (Quaracchi, 1882–1902). Latin texts are indicated by volume and page number in parentheses. The idea that the Father is innascible and fecund underlies the dialectical style of Bonaventure's thought. It also provides the basis of Bonaventure's metaphysics as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The Father's innascibility and fecundity are mutually complementary opposites which cannot be formally reduced to one or the other; the Father is generative precisely because he is unbegotten. See Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* 42, n. 51.

²⁰ Bonaventure *I Sent.* d. 5, a. 1, q. 2, resp. (I, 115); *I Sent.* d. 2, a. u., q. 4, fund 2 (I, 56); Hayes, introduction, 34 n. 10. Bonaventure uses the terms *per modum naturae* and *per modum voluntatis* to designate the two trinitarian emanations. The terms are inspired by Aristotle's principle that there exist only two perfect modes of production; namely, natural and free.

²¹ Bonaventure, as Ewert Cousins noted, was influenced by Greek trinitarian theology and thus it is reasonable to suggest that Zizioulas's new read of Cappadocian theology is also relevant to Bonaventure. See Ewert Cousins, "The Two Poles of St. Bonaventure's Theology," *Sancta Bonaventura: 1274–1974*, vol. 4, ed. Jacques G. Bougerol (Rome: Grottaferatta, 1974) 156–58; Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978) 53.

²² Papanikolaou, "Divine Energies or Divine Personhood" 368.

Father is infinite, communicative love which shares itself with another, the Son [by nature], and it is precisely in the relationship between the Father and Son united in the Spirit [who expresses the freedom-in-love between the Father and Son] that God is. Thus, we may say that God's being is not something over and above the Trinity of persons [there is no substance *per se*] but is rooted in the fecundity of the Father. The ontology [ground] of being is not substantive but relational, since the basis of all that exists is the [personal] relationship of love between the Father and Son united in the Spirit.

The key to Bonaventure's trinitarian theology lies in self-expression. According to Bonaventure, the relationship between the Father and Son is the basis of all other relationships.²³ The Father, the fountain fullness of love, is always moving toward the Son in the sharing of love, and the Son loves the Father in the Spirit. Thus, the relationship of love between the Father and Son is one of "self-expression." The Father completely expresses himself in one other than himself, namely, the Son. As the expression of the Father, the Son is Word or exemplar of all the divine ideas. The Word, therefore, does not exist as a self-sufficient entity but precisely as the expression of the Father. When we say that "all things are created through the Word" (John 1:3), we are saying that the Father expresses himself in the Son and this self-expression is the basis of the infinite Word as well as finite existence. What is described therefore as "causality" lies in the relationship of the Father and Son and the self-diffusive nature of the Father to express himself in the Son, a union in love that is manifested in the Spirit.

Creation, as a "coming into existence," emerges in the relationship between the Father and Son. In this respect, creation is a finite expression of the infinite Word of God. It is caught up in the mystery of the generation of the Word from the Father and is generated out of the fecundity of God's love. Creation's fecundity is a limited expression of the infinite and dynamic love between the Father and Son united in the Spirit. Creation, therefore, is not a mere external act of God, an object on the fringe of divine power; rather, it is rooted in the self-diffusive goodness of God's inner life and emerges out of the innermost depths of trinitarian life.²⁴ Since creation emanates out of and is a limited expression of divine goodness, we may think of creation as unfolding "within" the trinitarian relations of divine love rather than being radically separate from God, as a substantive view of God might suggest.²⁵

²³ Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 47.

²⁴ Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (New York: New City, 2001) 54.

²⁵ Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1999) 30.

CREATION: A SINGLE ACT OF LOVE

Whereas contemporary models of divine action struggle to find a complementary relationship between God and creation without violating the orders of infinite and finite being, Bonaventure offers a completely integral relationship between God and creation precisely because God is Trinity and the Word is center.²⁶ The fecundity of God's inner life, the nature of which involves free self-communication, is the same fecundity that provides for the diversity of creation. Here we might say that the input of energy into the space-time continuum that brings about change (creation) is none other than the love between the Father and Son. Because the Word is both center of the Trinity and exemplar of creation, the Word is the "ontological link" between God's being (Trinity) and God's action (creation). God does what God is—love. The fundamental relationship of the Father–Son/Word means that there is really only one primordial relationship (namely, the Father–Son–Spirit) both within the Trinity and in creation.²⁷ While creation flows out of the relationship between the Father and Son, the Father's goodness is really communicated to only one other, namely, the Son or Word who, as Word, expresses the Father's divine ideas.²⁸ The Father by loving the Word loves all things in and through the Word. It is in the Word that the fecundity of the Father finds its perfect image; and it is from the Word that all creation flows, and it is to the Word, as exemplar, that it reflects back and returns.²⁹ Since this relationship is the basis for all that exists, I have suggested that creation is an act of the

²⁶ It is important to state at this point that while I am using Bonaventure's theology to argue for an eternal creation, Bonaventure himself was against such an idea. The principal reason for his rejection of an eternal creation lies in the relationship of being and non-being. In his view it is impossible for something that has being after non-being to exist from all eternity, for that implies a contradiction. Since the world has being after non-being, the world cannot be eternal. Bonaventure contrasted creation *ex nihilo* to the trinitarian relationships of the Father and Son whereby the Son is generated by the Father. In both cases there is a production, and in both cases the production is due to an equally infinite power. But, whereas in the generation of the Son by the Father there is identity of substance that excluded any change or transition from nothing to being, as well as any beginning of *esse*, in creation there is a production *ex nihilo* by which the *esse* comes after the *non esse*. This is what is meant by the expression *feri ex nihilo*: to be made from nothing, to begin to exist. See Bonaventure II *Sent.* d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2 (II, 22); II *Sent.* q. 1 (II, 33). Despite Bonaventure's own objections to an eternal creation, his theology allows us to argue in favor of such an idea.

²⁷ See Ilia Delio, "Does God 'Act'? A Bonaventurian Response," *Heythrop Journal* 44 (2003) 328–44.

²⁸ Zachary Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation in the Theology of St. Bonaventure," in *Studies Honoring Ignatius Brady, Friar Minor*, ed. Romano Stephen Almagno and Conrad Harkins (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1976) 314.

²⁹ Cousins, "Two Poles of St. Bonaventure's Theology" 161.

Father's love for the Son and the mutuality of love united in the Spirit.³⁰ In this respect, it is not feasible to talk about God's action in creation, as if this action is distinct from God's infinite trinitarian life. Since God's being is God's action and God's being is love, God's action is an eternal-temporal act of love.³¹ Creation, as Denis Edwards notes, takes place and flourishes within the divine life.³²

The idea of creation as a single eternal-temporal act of love is not entirely a new one. Hans Urs Von Balthasar described God's action in creation as "the play within the play."³³ That is, the drama of divine action in creation takes place within the drama of trinitarian life. Balthasar writes: "It is the drama of the 'emptying' of the Father's heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between a God and a world. For any world only has its place within that distinction between Father and Son that is maintained and bridged by the Holy Spirit."³⁴ As Edwards states: "for Von Balthasar, every drama that can be played out in creation is already contained in and surpassed in the eternal 'event' of inner trinitarian love whereby the Father begets the Word. The begetting of the Word is an eternal act of letting go, of divine *kenosis*, of creating space for the other."³⁵

The implications of Balthasar's intratrinitarian *kenosis* are profound. According to Jürgen Moltmann, "this premises that the world of human beings and death does not exist outside God, but that from the very beginning it lies within the mystery of the Trinity: the Father creates the world out of love for the Son—the Son redeems the world from sin and death through his emptying of himself out of love for the Father."³⁶ If this becoming of the world is grounded in the eternal trinitarian process, then

³⁰ See Ilia Delio, "Does God Act?" 337.

³¹ Kevin P. Keane, "Why Creation? Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas on God as Creative Good," *Downside Review* 93 (April 1975) 117–19. Keane offers some interesting insights with regard to creation and divine goodness. He writes: "Bonaventure attempted to provide a more adequate answer to the 'why' of finite being . . . more in keeping with the affirmation of creation's fittingness expressed in the Christian experience of the perfect Word/Reason (*Logos*) as incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth." He goes on to say that "the fate of the world, for good or for ill, is of consequence to God, for his goodness is radically involved: he would not be the good itself, the best, were he to abandon the project once under way or complacently witness its disaster."

³² Edwards, *God of Evolution* 30.

³³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 20.

³⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) 327.

³⁵ Edwards, *God of Evolution* 30–31.

³⁶ Moltmann, "God's *Kenosis* in the Creation and Consummation of the World," in *The Work of Love* 141.

it is reasonable to suggest, as Edwards does, “that God does not create discrete individual beings through a series of interventions, but rather God creates in one divine act that embraces the whole process. It is this one divine act that enables what is radically new to emerge in creation.”³⁷

DIVINE ACTION AS DIVINE RELATIONSHIP

The idea that divine action is one eternal-temporal act of love between the Father and Son is supported by the idea that the Trinity is a communion of persons-in-love. God is not an actor vis-à-vis the act of creation, as we find with episodic models of divine action, in which God is described as substantive in nature, acting as “efficient cause” either “top-down” or “bottoms-up.”³⁸ Rather, as Bonaventure notes, divine essence is self-diffusive goodness expressed in personal relationships of love. Fecundity is transcendence. Thus God does not need to create since infinite fecundity lies within the Godhead itself. That God creates, however, reflects who God is, namely, self-communicative love.

Because the nature of God lies precisely in fecundity, the question “how” God creates cannot be separated from the question “why” God creates, since the very nature of the Trinity as self-communicative love is itself the basis of action. Bonaventure’s theology allows us to say that the triune God does not act on discrete levels of creation, as if connecting things together nor does God act in every single discrete event as an individual “actor.” God does not “act” to cause things to change; rather, things change because God is love and love is attractive. God is a relationship of love whose “action” in creation is an eternal/temporal “act” of love. In light of this idea, I would suggest that instead of talking about creation as divine action, it may be more reasonable to talk about creation as divine relationship.³⁹ Just as the Father is related to the Son in and through the Spirit, so too God is related to creation. It is in and through the Son as exemplar and the Spirit as life that the Father embraces creation.⁴⁰ Divine

³⁷ Edwards, *God of Evolution* 76.

³⁸ See, for example, A. R. Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 53–54; Philip Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 227; Ian Barbour, “God’s Power: A Process View,” in *Work of Love* 3.

³⁹ Moltmann, *God in Creation* 83–84. Moltmann writes: “It is more appropriate if we view the eternal divine life as a life of eternal, infinite love, which in the creative process issues in its overflowing rapture from its trinitarian perfection and completeness, and comes to itself in the eternal rest of sabbath” (p. 84). Moltmann goes on to say that the one divine love operates in different ways in the divine life and in the divine creativity, making possible the distinction between God and the world.

⁴⁰ We might note here the emphasis Bonaventure places on the humility of God

action as divine relationship preempts the search for any type of mechanistic divine action; thus, epistemological gaps are to be expected in this God-world relationship, especially if we concede that creation is grounded in the primordial *mystery* of trinitarian love.⁴¹

If divine action is the relationship between the Trinity and creation, we might say that the Trinity of love is always attracting creation as the beloved, as the Father attracts the Son in the eternal breath of the Spirit's love. By "creation" I mean the whole universe as well as each unique, individual part within the universe. God attracts the whole as well as each individual part according to the degree of its relationship with God. It is the attractive loving power of the Father-Son-Spirit relationship that "creates" temporally (by the power of attraction) with a view toward love. This corresponds to the emphasis in process theology on attraction and persuasion.⁴² Using the metaphor from chaos theory one may suggest that the triune God is a "strange attractor."⁴³ In and through the divine Word, the

in view of the intimate relationship between the Father and Son. In his "Sermon on the Nativity" he begins by saying that [in the Incarnation] "the eternal God has humbly bent down and lifted the dust of our nature into unity with his own person." This notion of divine humility allows us to say that the Father, who is hidden in the Son, embraces the world in love. See Bonaventure, "Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord," in *What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure*, trans. and commentary by Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1989) 57; Ilia Delio, "Bonaventure's Metaphysics of the Good," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 235-39.

⁴¹ Howard Van Till, "The Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped?" *Theology Today* 55 (1998) 344-64. As Van Till notes, there are epistemological gaps in creation, since we do not know in full detail and with certainty just how each form of life came to be actualized in the course of time. Such gaps, however, do not belie the "robust formational economy" of creation, which we identify here as goodness. See esp. p. 351.

⁴² Paul S. Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love," in *The Work of Love* 186; Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action" *ibid.* 92; Keith Ward, "Cosmos and Kenosis" *ibid.* 162.

⁴³ The term "strange attractor," arising from chaos theory, describes the shape of chaos or spontaneous movements of a system that deviate from the normal pattern of order. The use of computer imagery has helped to detect spontaneous non-linear deviations in systems that signify new patterns of order. A strange attractor is a basin of attraction that pulls the system into a visible shape. It is, in some way, the spontaneous non-linear variation in a system that ultimately causes a new pattern of order to emerge. Some scientists have claimed that the appearance of the "strange attractor" means that order is inherent in chaos since the "attractor" itself is a novel pattern of order that arises spontaneously within a system. When systems are dislodged from a stable state, there is first a period of oscillation prior to a state of full chaos or a period of total unpredictability; it is during this time that the strange attractor seems to "spontaneously" appear. Very slight variations, so small as to be indiscernible, can amplify into unpredictable results when they are fed back

Trinity is present to creation as involved goodness, yet transcendent in divine fecundity. As the strange attractor, God is always luring creation toward the more or, we might say, the optimal good. Creation is an expression of God's desire that [finite] others share in the glory of [infinite] trinitarian love. God's desire for that which God creates means that creation cannot be in a state of equilibrium or at rest but rather is dynamically oriented toward the triune God. As the attraction of love, creation does not mean bringing new things into existence per se but rather it means maximizing goodness (or love) in creation.⁴⁴ In this respect, we might think of creation as the attraction toward a complexity of goodness or love since the process of creation, as an evolutionary process, underscores an increase in complexity and union.

CREATION *DAS ZWISCHEN*

If creation is really a single, continuous divine "act" of the Trinity, that is, an eternal-temporal self-communication of love between the Father and Son united in the Spirit, then we must discard the view of God as "actor"—the substantive view—and posit a new view of divine relationship, a teleological one. God does not act episodically by causing discrete acts in discrete events; God does not "make" things happen. Rather, God "acts" teleologically as the goal toward which the finite good tends. If we concede to this idea then God does not really "act" at all. Rather, God is the relational ground of that which exists and is personally related to everything that exists as involved goodness or love, which makes love the energy or dynamism of life and thus the basis of creation's self-transcendent nature. This is in agreement with Stephen Happel's idea that reality is intrinsically relational because God is present as inner relationality.⁴⁵

To say that God "acts" teleologically is to say that God is the ground of creation and is faithful to that which exists because everything in creation bears an integral relation to God. Again, while each aspect of creation bears an immediate relationship with God by virtue of its unique existence,

on themselves. See Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994) 105; David Toolan, *At Home in the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001) 200.

⁴⁴ Van Till, "Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped?" 344–64. Van Till's notion of a robust creation fully endowed "to make possible the actualization of all inanimate structures and all life forms that have ever appeared in the course of time" supports the idea that goodness is the source and basis of creation.

⁴⁵ Stephen Happel, "Divine Providence and Instrumentality," in *Chaos and Complexity*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur R. Peacocke (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory, 1995) 200.

each aspect of creation does not express God to the same degree. Bonaventure's doctrine of exemplarism suggests that some parts of creation (ex. leptons, dust particles) remotely express God while humans directly express the divine image because of the soul's *capax Dei*. However, the notion of divine action as teleological pertains to all of creation, especially if we understand the human person as emergent within the creative evolutionary process. Based on positive human relationships, we may say that the relationship itself rather than any "act" of the subjects involved imparts life and draws the subjects toward the fullness of life—union.

Martin Buber in his book, *I and Thou*, claimed that two human beings by their dynamic interrelation co-create what he called "the Between" (*das Zwischen*), a meeting place where the two subjectivities can influence and affect one another without danger of the one being absorbed into the other as an accidental modification of the other's existence and activity.⁴⁶ True relationship is creative because it is precisely in the relationship—the love shared between persons on the human level—that each person is constantly challenged to grow. Each person becomes their "fullest self" because the relationship draws out the best in that person, bringing the person to a new level of being. Applied to the God-world relationship, we can say that creation takes place *das Zwischen*, that is, precisely in the relationship between God and the object of God's love, whether on the microcosmic or macrocosmic level.⁴⁷ As the finite self-expression of God's fecund goodness, creation progresses toward ultimate goodness [despite the failures within it] because the Father loves the Son in the Spirit, that is, because God is love. Since God's love can never be fully exhausted by its very nature of being infinite, so too creation has no other goal than that of perfect goodness which is participation in the intense generosity of Being itself.

To conceive of divine action as teleological is to say that God "acts" by attracting creation toward the optimal good or the fullness of life. This attraction undergirds the dynamic of continuous creation that aims toward a new creation. The divine Good desires the best of the created good and draws creation toward the highest good without forcing it to do so. Understanding the triune God as the fecundity of goodness allows us to move from efficient causality to final causality, from episodic action to teleological attraction. Since it is virtually impossible to talk of a "beginning" of creation, the best we can say is that creation is a finite expression of the

⁴⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Roland Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner's, 1970) 37–72.

⁴⁷ See Joseph A. Bracken, "Intersubjectivity and the Coming of God," *Journal of Religion* 83 (2003) 397.

infinite love of the Father for the Son, and is drawn into the fullness of this relationship of love through the eternal breath of the Spirit.

WHY DOES GOD CREATE?

The idea of divine action as relationship and self-expression preempts the classical notion of action according to divine will, that is, an arbitrary and radically free act of the divine will with no intrinsic suitability on God's part, as Aquinas maintained.⁴⁸ Creation according to divine will means that God freely wills to create for no other reason or purpose than his own desire and delight.⁴⁹ Thomas was emphatic in asserting the total freedom of the divine will in choosing to create.⁵⁰ To assert that creation is solely the divine will of God, however, renders creation radically contingent on the absolute power of God (*potentia Dei absoluta*). That is, there is no real integral relation between creation and the life of God; rather creation is merely a divine possibility and not an expression of divine love. Could this really be the God of Jesus Christ, a God who acts by sheer "will power"? If so, how do we understand the meaning of the cross wherein lies the new creation, especially if the cross signifies the fullest expression of God as love, as Bonaventure maintained?

To concede that God creates strictly according to divine will, one would have to ask, what, if anything, moves him to do so? What motivates God's decision to create? One would have to posit either a change in the degree of divine will insofar as God "decides" to create, or one could, like Moltmann, suggest an eternal resolve to create, that is, God "commits himself to create a world from all eternity."⁵¹ To say that God eternally commits himself to create a world, however, suggests that there is a primacy of creation within the Godhead. And this is a radical departure from

⁴⁸ Keane, "Why Creation?" 100–01.

⁴⁹ According to Thomas, there are four reasons why God creates according to his will. First, the universe as a whole has some particular end or finality; were this not so, everything would happen by chance. This end must be set by God who acts according to his will. Second, what is produced by way of nature is equal to and of the same nature as the producer. Creatures are not equal to God and therefore are created according to the will of God. Third, an effect must pre-exist in its cause according to the proper mode of the cause's own being. Fourth, Aristotle points out that there are two types of action or act: one kind is found within and identical with the agent itself and the kind which goes out from the agent "into" something receptive, an act which in its very movement beyond the agent is both the agent's and the receiver's perfection and act. See Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia* a. 3, art. 15, resp.; I *Sent.* d. 43, a. 1; d. 45, q. 3. This was the universal Christian position held by any believer in a God who freely and generously creates the world.

⁵⁰ Keane, "Why Creation?" 106, 109.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *God in Creation* 80.

the act of creation strictly according to divine will. It seems to me that creation as a result of sheer divine willpower makes God somewhat whimsical. If it is only divine will that brought creation into being, then that same will could [in theory] annihilate that which is created. A whimsical God contradicts the nature of God as self-communicative love, since love implies a commitment to the other.⁵² If creation is merely willed by God because God desires [his] own pleasure and glory, then instead of Aristotle's unmoved Mover or Thomas's God of self-thinking thought, we wind up with a delightfully narcissistic God.

Whereas the question of divine will is compatible with the substantive view of God as divine being, Bonaventure found it wholly "natural" or appropriate that God should create by nature of the self-diffusive good. In his commentary on the *Sentences* he wrote: "Because [God] is most perfect, he is of the highest goodness; because he is of the highest goodness, he wills to produce many things and to share himself."⁵³ Unlike Aquinas's God of self-thinking thought/self-loving will, Bonaventure viewed creation as a limited actualization of the infinite and dynamic life that marks the divine order. He elaborates on this idea in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*:

For good is said to be self-diffusive; therefore the highest good must be self-diffusive. . . . For the diffusion in time in creation is no more than a center or point in relation to the immensity of the divine goodness. Hence another diffusion can be conceived greater than this, namely, one in which the one diffusing communicates to the other his entire substance and nature. Therefore it would not be the highest good if it could lack this, either in reality or thought.⁵⁴

While Bonaventure sees the divine will as acting upon and expressing the tendency of the good toward self-diffusion, it is not "sheer will" but the natural tendency of divine being to share itself with another. There is a genuine fittingness to creation for Bonaventure, as Kevin Keane notes: "if it is possible for the good to diffuse itself not only in an infinite manner in the trinitarian processions, but also in a temporally and spatially limited way in creation, there is every reason to presume that it should do so (and,

⁵² This idea is also noted by Paul S. Fiddes who writes: "But there seems to be something profoundly unsatisfactory about this notion of God's choosing to love the world in such a way that we can say 'he need not have done so' or 'he could have done otherwise.'" It does not seem to touch the core of the meaning of love, which must be more than willing the good of another as one alternative among other possibilities." See Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York: Oxford University, 1988) 75; Paul R. Sponheim, *The Pulse of Creation: God and the Transformation of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 96–97.

⁵³ Bonaventure, *II Sent.*, cited in Keane, "Why Creation?" 11.

⁵⁴ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*Itin.*) 6.2. Engl. trans. Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Major Life of Saint Francis* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 103–4.

of course, it actually has done so for Bonaventure).⁵⁵ Were it not for the infinite diffusion of the Father in the trinitarian processions and, on a lesser scale, were it not for the diffusion of creation, God would not be the highest good. This dynamic generosity [of goodness] that “calls the universe” into being is then “no accident of being, no fortuitous occurrence, but an aspect essential to being in its very depths. If the universe does not exist by mechanical necessity, neither is it the consequence of mere chance.”⁵⁶ While Bonaventure acknowledges God’s essential transcendence of any real “need” for the created world [since fecundity is realized within the divine life], he sees that very transcendental goodness as “compelling” itself to create a universe, that is, to express itself in a finite way so as to manifest and contribute to the perfect realization of divine goodness/being.⁵⁷ In other words, if the universe does not ground the divine goodness, it is in a certain way its realization. As Keane writes, “it is *in* the creation of the world, if not *by* it, that God is really goodness itself.”⁵⁸

This leads us to suggest that creation is not a divine whim but intrinsic to the very nature of God as love, indeed, to the perfection of God as love. Creation is not radically separate from God but it is a limited actualization [finite being] of the infinite and dynamic life that marks the divine order. To say that the universe shares in the mystery of the Trinity means that the universe is caught up in the dynamic process of self-transcendence and self-communication of inter-penetrating relationships and creative love. Because creation unfolds within the trinitarian relationships, the ground of created being is personal and relational. God creates because God is freedom-in-love and desires to share love in a finite way as a more perfect expression of the infinitely fecund divine life.

IS CREATION ETERNAL?

The integral relationship between the Trinity and creation, seen through the lens of Bonaventure’s theology, raises the question: “was there ever a time when creation was not?”⁵⁹ Is creation an eternal act of God? The

⁵⁵ Keane, “Why Creation?” 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 116.

⁵⁷ In his *Hexaëmeron* Bonaventure writes: “God’s being is supreme good, wherefore it supremely diffuses itself in a threefold outpouring: utterly actual, complete, and directed toward an end, that is, most final. Because it is utterly actual, it always is, always was, and always shall be; it always begets, always has begotten, and always shall beget. Now no creature can have so great a power that is always is, always was, and always shall be; whereby by necessity it (God’s being) must emanate as an eternal being.” See Bonaventure, *Hexaëmeron* 11.11 (V, 382). Engl. trans. José de Vinck, *On the Six Days of Creation* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1966) 163.

⁵⁸ Keane, “Why Creation?” 120; Fiddes, “Creation Out of Love” 177–78.

⁵⁹ As I indicated before, Bonaventure was firmly opposed to the idea of an

question arises of course only when creation is considered within the context of divine love and relationality, not according to divine will, since the understanding of the divine will to create takes place apart from the divine nature. While it is reasonable to say that God does not need creation since fecundity is realized within the Godhead, still without creation there would be no means for God's goodness to be expressed. It is only because of creation that God's goodness is *good*.

If we understand God's will as desire, as Paul Fiddes suggests, then there can be no "otherwise" in the love of God for creation. In this respect, God needs creation in order to be the perfect absolute expression of love. Fiddes claims that God does not "need" the world in the sense that there is some intrinsic necessity in his nature, binding his free choice (thus far Aquinas is right); but he does need the world in the sense that he has freely chosen to be in need.⁶⁰ He writes: "There seems to be something profoundly unsatisfactory about this notion of God's choosing to love the world in such a way that we can say 'he need not have done so' or 'he could have done otherwise.'" It does not seem to touch the core of the meaning of love, which must be more than willing the good of another as one alternative among other possibilities."⁶¹ In Fiddes's view, God would not love perfectly if God could choose otherwise.

Jürgen Moltmann, among others, entertains the question whether or not an eternal creation is "natural" to God. Moltmann contends that if creation is not divinely "natural," then it is a resolve of the divine will. We can of course (as Moltmann does) interpret the divine will to create as a divine resolve of will or God's commitment to the world.⁶² Moltmann states that the activity that is immanent to God and essential to his nature is the eternal, unchangeable resolve of his essential nature. This resolve is the creative decree. His resolve to create, therefore, is an "eternal" resolve, not an arbitrary one. God's resolve bears all the essential characteristics of God: it is absolute, eternal, unchangeable. As an essential resolve, God, in

eternal creation for reasons described in his second book of commentary on the *Sentences*. However, his theology points in this direction. For a summary on Bonaventure's position against an eternal creation see Bernardino Bonansea, "The Impossibility of Creation from Eternity According to St. Bonaventure," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 48 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1974) 121-35.

⁶⁰ Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God* 74.

⁶¹ Ibid. 71. Process theologians, beginning with Whitehead, maintain that God and the world have always coexisted because the absolute factor of the creative process requires both God and other actualities as necessary component parts. It is for this reason that process thinkers do not hold a literal *creation ex nihilo* because God creates by working with what already exists. See also Ian G. Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View," in *Work of Love* 16.

⁶² Moltmann, *God in Creation* 80.

a sense, has "no choice." God's resolve is an activity or tendency of the divine will in accordance with the nature of God, to do in the course of time that which can and should serve the revelation of God's glory. The goal of this divine resolve, therefore, is the revelation of God's glory. In that glory God's own eternal life and nature are manifested. The creation of a world different from Godself is the first step toward realizing this eternal resolution to reveal the glory that is the essence of his nature. Thus, creation's goal and end is the eschatological revelation of God's nature in glory.⁶³

While the notion of an eternal resolve of the divine will to create is appealing, it raises the question of God's freedom. Does God create *freely* or not? Or as Moltmann asks, what concept of freedom is appropriate to God? Moltmann's answer is illuminating:

If we start from the point of view of the created being, the Creator appears as almighty and gracious. His freedom has no limits, and his commitment to what he has created is without obligation. But if we start from the Creator himself, the self-communication of his goodness in love to his creation is not a matter of his free will. It is the self-evident operation of his eternal nature. The essential activity of God is the eternal resolve of his will and the eternal resolve of his will is his essential activity. In other words, God is not entirely free when he can do and leave undone what he likes; he is entirely free when he is entirely himself. In his creative activity, he is wholly and entirely himself.⁶⁴

This position comes close to what I perceive in Bonaventure's theology. As the fecundity of self-communicative goodness, God expresses himself in the fullest way possible. Paul Tillich claimed that the divine life is essentially creative and actualizes itself in inexhaustible abundance.⁶⁵ In this respect, God did not "decide" for creation once upon a time. Creation is neither chance nor necessity but a fundamental expression of God as love. Thus, it is neither possible nor feasible to talk about a *beginning* in time [or of time] but rather only about fundamental relationships between God and world. Here I must admit we depart from Bonaventure who vehemently opposed the eternity of the world.⁶⁶ He claimed that without a true beginning and end, there could be no real exemplary relationship between God

⁶³ Ibid. 81. Steven Bouma-Prediger points to the tension in Moltmann's idea of withdrawal as necessary for creation and the hope of an eschatological unification of God and creation. He writes: "If, as Moltmann maintains, the self-limitation of God and the creation of a primordial nihil is a necessary condition for the world to exist, and if redemption is the refilling of that space, then how can the fundamental distinction between God and creation be preserved in the eschatological redemption of all things?" See Steven Bouma-Prediger, "Creation as the Home of God: The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997) 80.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 82–83.

⁶⁵ See Moltmann, *God in Creation* 83.

⁶⁶ See Bonansea, "Impossibility of Creation from Eternity" 122–30.

and creation, a position he defended against the Averroists.⁶⁷ His trinitarian theology, however, certainly lends itself to a more liberal interpretation. For the very nature of God as self-diffusive goodness leads us to suggest that God is creative by nature. Although Tillich maintained that divine life and divine creativity are one and the same,⁶⁸ I would suggest, in light of Bonaventure's theology, that while creation may be eternal it is not divine by nature. This of course was Bonaventure's dilemma. He could not visualize a world, or any created being for that matter, that could possibly exist from all eternity and still retain its nature as contingent, changeable, and therefore limited being.⁶⁹ What I am suggesting, however, is that creation is "infinitely finite." By this I mean that creation is always marked by unique events and contingent on God. Because it is essentially related to God's self-expressive and self-communicative nature as love, the best we can say is that creation expresses God's infinite goodness in a finite way.

THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST: KEY TO AN ETERNAL CREATION

While the argument for an eternal creation is favored by kenotic theology that views God as self-communicative love, still the argument is not entirely theologically persuasive. It is reasonable to say that if divine love is arbitrary, then it cannot be perfectly committed to another; thus, it is more reasonable to suggest that there is something "compelling" about the nature of God's love to share itself with another and thus to create. We could suggest that the nature of God to share love is realized in the relationships between the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁷⁰ Augustine indicated that there is an "eros" character in the divine love, as God desires and enjoys God's own self in triune communion.⁷¹ But as Fiddes points out, an immanent Trinity detached from the *oikonomia* of God in the world is a mere speculation.⁷² According to Franciscan theologians, the perfection of God's

⁶⁷ Bonaventure was involved in the Averroist controversy at the University of Paris during his tenure as Minister General of the Franciscan Order. The Latin Averroists centered their claims on an independent philosophy, affirming the eternity of the world and the unity of the intellect among other teachings. See C. Colt Anderson, *A Call to Piety: Saint Bonaventure's Collations on the Six Days* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan, 2002) vii.

⁶⁸ Moltmann, *God in Creation* 83.

⁶⁹ Bonansea, "Impossibility of Creation from Eternity" 131.

⁷⁰ Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love" 177. Although Bonaventure acknowledges that only God's Being can emanate as eternal Being (*Hex.* 11.11) since no creature can fully express the eternal good, still he does not view the divine self-diffusive goodness apart from creation. This is the mystery of Christ he explores in chapter six of the *Itinerarium*.

⁷¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.3 cited in Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love" 178.

⁷² Fiddes, "Creation Out of Love" 178.

love is realized not only in the infinite life of God but in the sharing of love with a finite other. Duns Scotus suggested that from all eternity God freely willed to love a finite other who could respond perfectly in love, and this is Christ. From all eternity, therefore, the Incarnation is willed as the perfect expression of divine love, which makes the predestination of Christ a primary reason for the eternity of creation.

It is interesting that as far back as the third century, Origen of Alexandria posited the eternity of creation based on the relationship between the Father and the Son. In his *First Principles* he indicated that as long as God has existed, so too creatures have existed, and while this idea may be difficult to accept according to human reason, still it is not opposed to piety. Origen wrote:

This truth, which can be confessed without any risk to piety, presents itself as appropriate to the small and narrow capacity of our mind, namely, that God the Father always existed, and that he always had an only-begotten Son, who at the same time, according to the explanation we have given above, is called Wisdom. This is that Wisdom in whom God delighted when the world was finished, in order that we might understand from this that God ever rejoices. In this Wisdom, therefore, who ever existed with the Father, the Creation was always present in form and outline, and there was never a time when the pre-figuration of those things that hereafter were to be did not exist in Wisdom.⁷³

What Origen indicated is that the eternity of creation is theologically feasible precisely because of the relationship between the Father and Son, who is Wisdom. Since God makes all things through Wisdom, the eternity of Wisdom underscores the eternity of creation so that, according to Origen, "it is clear that God did not begin to create after spending a period in idleness."⁷⁴

Using Bonaventure's theology, I would build on Origen's profound insight by saying that the expressive relationship between the Father and Son is the ground of an eternal act of creation. Although Bonaventure strongly emphasizes that the exemplary character of the Word does not make the act of creation necessary since the Word represents the Father to himself in his unlimited possibilities,⁷⁵ still the expression of the Father in the Son is due to the self-diffusive goodness of the Father which necessarily expresses itself in the Son so that the Son can say, "all things that the Father has are mine" (John 16:15).⁷⁶ Thus, even though Bonaventure would concede that the act of creation is fundamentally a free act of God, it is the free

⁷³ Origen, *On First Principles*, bk.1, chap. 4, trans. G. W. Butterworth, intro. Henri de Lubac (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973) 42.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 43.

⁷⁵ Zachary Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 315.

⁷⁶ Bonaventure, *Hex.* 11.11 (V, 382). Engl. trans. De Vinck, *Six Days of Creation* 163.

overflow of his necessary, inner-divine fruitfulness.⁷⁷ This one act of expression of the Father in the Son by which the Father totally loves the Son, is the act in which creation is caught up or, we might say, emerges. As Zachary Hayes writes: "when God creates, he can do so only in and through the Word of His own otherness, so that whatever created reality exists appears as the external otherness that is placed through the immanent otherness. Creation, therefore, in its inner constitution possesses a relation to the uncreated Word of God."⁷⁸ Creation finitely expresses the infinite love of the Father for the Son in the Spirit. Everything other than the Father is grounded in the primal otherness that is the Son. While the Word is the full, immanent expression of all that the Father is in one who is other than the Father, the world is the external expression of the immanent Word.⁷⁹ The Word, therefore, mediates between the Father and creation and is the center between them. If we take this relationship one step further, I would suggest that the significance of this relationship for an eternal creation lies in the primacy of Christ.

While Bonaventure did not view sin as the primary reason for the Incarnation, he also did not explicitly profess that Christ is first in God's intention to love, as Scotus claimed.⁸⁰ Yet, he comes close to the notion of the primacy of Christ by saying that we [and all creation] are ordained to Christ who expresses the excess love and mercy of God.⁸¹ In Bonaventure's view, the Incarnation is freely willed for its own sake and not for any lesser good. Scotus described the primacy of Christ much more clearly by saying that God is perfect love and wills according to the perfection of love. Since perfect love cannot will anything less than the perfection of love, Christ would have come in the highest glory in creation even if there was no sin and thus no need for redemption. Christ is the center and summit of all God's creative and redemptive works; all of creation is ordered to him. God, therefore, intended the highest glory as the ultimate and final end, and then the Incarnation as leading to that end.⁸² Because the Incarnation is first in God's desire to communicate love to a finite other [from all eternity], it is possible to speak of a primacy of creation. That is, God's

⁷⁷ Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 315.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 322.

⁸⁰ For Scotus's position on the primacy of Christ, see Mary Beth Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 2003) 74–78.

⁸¹ Bonaventure writes: "Non enim Christus ad nos finaliter ordinatur, sed nos finaliter ordinamur ad ipsum" (See III *Sent.* d. 32, q. 5, ad 3 [III, 706]; Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 328).

⁸² Ilia Delio, "Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 3–23, at 8.

resolve to love in a finite way from all eternity is God's eternal commitment to create. Since there is no Christ apart from creation, we may consider the eternity of creation and its contingency based on the primacy of Christ.

The integral relation between Incarnation and creation lends itself to a further argument for an eternal creation through the coincidence of opposites. According to Bonaventure, the coincidence of opposites is rooted in the dialectical nature of the divine person of the Father. Because the Father is without origin (*innascibilis*), he is fecund and thus self-communicative (*bonum diffusivum sui*). The generativity of the Father is expressed in the Son and Spirit. Whereas the Son is both generated by the Father and with the Father generates the Spirit, the Spirit is totally receptive to the Father's love. Within the Trinity, therefore, are the opposites of the Father and Spirit united by the Son who is center. In his *Itinerarium* Bonaventure describes the Trinity of opposites expressed in the mystery of Christ who is the perfect coincidence of opposites. He writes: "When our mind contemplates in Christ the Son of God . . . it sees united the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the center, the Alpha and the Omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature."⁸³ If Christ is the union of infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, Creator and creature, and Christ is the "firstborn of creation" [Colossians 1:15], then it is reasonable to suggest that creation, too, has existed from all eternity in God as finite, temporal and contingent and thus mutually opposite to God's infinite, eternal and immutable nature. Creation, like Christ who is the noble perfection of creation,⁸⁴ completes the otherness of God's love.⁸⁵

The significance of the primacy of Christ for the eternity of creation reflects the self-expressive and self-communicative nature of God as love. Since God's love is eternal and eternally expresses itself in a finite other, indicated by the primacy of Christ, we may suggest that creation, too, is eternal. It is the eternal act of the Father's love for the Son united in the Spirit. Thus, we may conclude with Origen that *this* world may pass away

⁸³ Bonaventure, *Itin.* 6.7 (V, 312). Engl. trans. Cousins, *Bonaventure* 108–9.

⁸⁴ Bonaventure, *De reductione artium ad theologiam* 20 (V, 324).

⁸⁵ Fiddes ("Creation Out of Love" 181) states that "the divine nature is something like God's 'identity,' which emerges from God's acts. According to this way of thinking, God freely determines the kind of God that God wills to be. As Karl Barth puts it, 'God's being is . . . his willed decision' (*Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77] II/I, 271–72)]. Building on Barth's thought, we might then regard creation as being part of God's self-definition, an integral factor in God's own self-determination, since God chooses to be completed through a created universe—or perhaps several universes."

but God's Word will never pass away and thus neither will the form of creation pass away.⁸⁶ God's eternal act of love yields to an eternal act of creation. For God is an outgoing, dynamic, trinitarian communion of love, and God simply would not know what to do without a lover who could respond in love not only infinitely but finitely for that, indeed, is the perfection of love.

CONCLUSION

The possibility of an eternal creation arises not from any new scientific view of the universe but from the revelation of God as love. The argument, therefore, stands theologically independent of any scientific theory. However, it is worthwhile to note that scientists today question whether or not the universe is oscillating, meaning that it expands and contracts with a big crunch before each big bang, or if it is a result of quantum vacuum fluctuations, that is, from a superspace of quantum fields and quantum laws.⁸⁷ The most widely accepted theory of course is the Big Bang by which the universe exploded into being at a particular point, although it is unclear why the universe came into being at all.

While scientists continue to explore the origin and developmental nature of the universe, one cannot help regard the argument for an eternal creation based on the nature of God as love. That the idea of an eternal creation was posited in the third century by Origen, long before evolution of the universe was known, indicates that the argument is not dependent on scientific evidence but on the revelation of the Trinity and the relationships between the Father, Son, and Spirit. In this respect, the argument for an eternal creation is neither scientific nor pantheistic but Christian, since the argument is based on the revelation of God as love in Jesus Christ. Hayes writes: "the possibility of God's creative activity rests in his being triune, which is another way of saying that God could not communicate being to the finite if he were not supremely communicative in himself."⁸⁸ I have taken this idea one step further by suggesting that from all eternity God willed to share life in a finite way and this is the primacy of Christ. An eternal creation rests on God's eternal resolve to love a finite other, and Christ is the first in God's intention to love. Here of course the significance

⁸⁶ We may note here that Alfred North Whitehead postulated an infinite sequence of "cosmic epochs" differing significantly from each other. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherborne (New York: Free, 1978) 91. Rem Edwards, "How Process Theology Can Affirm Creation *Ex Nihilo*," *Process Studies* 29 (2000) 77-96 claims that God is always related to some universe but not always to our particular cosmic history.

⁸⁷ Barbour, "God's Power: A Process View" in *Work of Love* 16.

⁸⁸ Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 315.

of Christ for creation is raised to a new level. If the Incarnation is what gives meaning to creation (and every creation), then does Christ appear anew in each successive epoch? This is a speculative question that is virtually impossible to answer but it does impel us to consider the relation between Christ and creation in a new way. The best one can say is that the perfection of love can never vacillate but must remain wholly committed to the other; thus, it is reasonable to suggest that God's eternal love is always finitely expressed. As the complementary opposites of God's infinite love, Christ and creation perfectly express that love.

While an eternal creation may seem to eradicate a creation *ex nihilo* it need not do so. An eternal creation does not necessarily mean that God uses pre-existing materials to create but rather everything that is created uniquely expresses the Word of God and thus is radically dependent on God. Even as Bonaventure noted, creation is only a point in time compared to the immensity of divine goodness.⁸⁹ That is, creation can never exhaust the ability of the Father to express himself in the Son so that creation always participates in the eternal life of God's self-expression; it is caught up in the eternal act of the Father's expressive love for the Son. And since this act is eternal it is reasonable that, whatever form it takes, creation shares eternally but finitely in this expression. We conclude, therefore, that *this* creation may pass away but a new creation will follow. For as long as the Word endures, so too will creation.

⁸⁹ Bonaventure, *Itin.* 6.2 (V, 310).

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