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Divine Lover:

Divine Life As Love in Creation

Introduction: Actualizing Divine Life as Love in God's Creative Activity

I NOW SHIFT FROM CONSIDERING GOD'S BEING AND ACTIVITY, AS methodologically abstracted from one another, to discussing divine love's actualization in God's creative activity.¹ Previously, I have surveyed characteristics and dimensions of God's being as love through attestations to divine activity in the history of Jesus the Nazarene. The present chapter examines the character of God's creative activity, as determined by the divine being, in order to disclose the meaning of the first presupposition for the Christian symbol of divine suffering as well as to illumine the basis upon which to analyze this symbol's second presupposition. Thus, I proceed in this chapter on the basis of the following question: *What does it mean to claim that a God whose being is love creates?*

Before I can offer an answer to the procedural question of this chapter, though, another series of questions requires attention. *Must a God whose being is love create? Does God create from necessity? Does the divine being or some external reality and power constrain God to create?* More specifically, does God *freely produce* creation (a claim that perhaps implies an arbitrary divine freedom), or does creation *necessarily emanate* from God as the growth or overflow of divine life (a

1. One theologian of divine suffering understands creation as "the first and external manifestation of the empathetic self-communication of God to participate and communion with us, whose very existence is determined by His will to be for us" (J. Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 47).

claim that perhaps implies an organic process but not necessarily divine personality).² This series of questions arises from a dilemma that numerous Christian theologians have posed: If God is love, as I have previously described the divine being, then God has no choice but to create an other to whom the divine desires to relate in love.³ Both this dilemma and its question to my analysis link themselves to issues of necessity for God: either a necessity within the divine being over which God's will exerts no control or a necessity outside the divine life with which God must struggle in order to accomplish the divine purposes by creating and within creation.⁴ From the perspective of that dilemma, to satisfy the eternity of divine being as love, then, God eternally requires another to whom God relates or can relate in love. Thus, from such a viewpoint, creation itself is everlasting.

2. John Macquarrie described this dilemma and attempted to combine the models (Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 200–5; also see *idem*, *In Search of Deity*, 177–79).

3. Some theologians describe this necessity as God's limitation by the divine being, or as "the holy limitedness of God, God's incapacity to be other than a caring presence" (Howe, "God's Power and God's Personhood," 49). Also, on God's limitation by the divine nature or being, see the following works: DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church*, 107–8; J. Williams, "Divine Limitation," 253–66; and A. Strong, "God's Self-Limitations," 521–32.

4. These issues organically link themselves to two other related ancient viewpoints that some contemporary theologians also hold in various forms: (1) the co-eternity of God and the creation; and (2) God's creation of the world from some sort of pre-existent matter. Some theologians describe the latter as "necessity," "the errant cause," "the nurse of all becoming," "the receptacle," "the recipient," or "space," as everlasting, indestructible, the situation for all that becomes. Analogically, Plato compared this *pre-existent principle* to a mother; Plato compared *being*, as the eternal model, to a father, while comparing *becoming* to an offspring of the union between the two parents (Plato, *Timaeus*, 47–53). Ancient Near Eastern myths depicted creation as a battle between a chaos-monster (a serpent or dragon) and a creator god. Ancient Israel adopted this metaphor (among others) and allusions to it to describe Yahweh's creation of the world as well: see Exod 15:1–27; Job 3:8; 40:15–41:34; Ps 74:12–17; Isa 51:9–11; Hab 3:1–19. The great sufferer, Job, reversed this metaphor, summoning Leviathan to reinstate chaos, as a protest or revolt against the disordered creation of his own experience (Perdue, "Job's Assault on Creation," 295–315; similarly, Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 175–200). Many modern and contemporary theologies formulate more recent versions of the Platonic paradigm in relation to these two viewpoints, versions in which to some degree either an internal or an external necessity for God remains (see Rolt, *World's Redemption*, 81–89, 107–8, 119; Whitehead, *Process and Reality*; Brightman, *Problem of God*, 107–38; *idem*, *Philosophy of Religion*, 305–41; Bertocci, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 389–468).

Orthodox Christian responses, both from theologies that attribute suffering to God and from theologies that refuse to attribute suffering to God, have denied that any kind of internal or external necessities can affect or constrain God's will.⁵ Thus, in this regard, the orthodox Christian symbol of creation has refused both the concept of the creation's eternity and the concept of a pre-existent or eternal matter (chaos) from which God fashioned the creation.⁶ Following this path, the Christian symbol of divine suffering presupposes that nothing either internal or external to God compels God to create. God creates only upon the basis of divine choice, as God actualizes that choice from the divine being as love. Hence, when God does choose to create, then God cannot relate arbitrarily to the creation, without contradicting the character of the divine being or life as love, even though God retains the freedom to violate the chosen divine character of love. Later, in my exposition of this symbol, this question emerges again in another form: Must God behave agapically, or must God forgive, sacrificing something of the divine self or claims for the other? In both cases, the present one and the one to follow in other parts of this project, God actualizes the divine life as love with grace. Nothing obligates God to forgive or to love sacrificially; if God chooses to forgive, however, God cannot relate arbitrarily to the object of divine forgiveness without contradicting God's freely-chosen fundamental character. Although I have not addressed every complexity in this question about necessity in divine creative activity, I have identified the parameters by which the Christian symbol of divine suffering, at this juncture at least, follows orthodox Christian attestations to the grace in God's free choices both to create and to re-create. On the basis of the humility in divine being as love, then, God creates. For this symbol, divine humility supplies the condition of possibility for God's self-sacrificial creative activity.

5. See Stott, "God on the Gallows," 28; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 19, a. 1. Thomas helpfully distinguished between two types of necessity for God. (1) He described that which God wills about the divine self as an *absolute necessity*. (2) He called that which God wills apart from the divine self a *suppositional necessity*, that is, necessary because God willed it and, therefore, God cannot un-will it, since God cannot do so without change; but it was not necessary that God will it originally.

6. Again, Thomas Aquinas forcefully delivered these refusals (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 44, a. 2; q. 45, a. 1; q. 46, a. 1, a. 2). Also see idem, *Sermon-Conferences of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostles' Creed*, 38–41.

Now, I return to my procedural question: What does it mean to claim that a God whose being is love creates? In an attempt to answer this question, I distinguish three aspects of God's creative activity from one another, within each of which the threefold structure of divine being as love characterizes that creative activity. God's being as love, therefore, radically affects the character of divine creative activity and, thereby, radically revises the classic Christian symbol of God as creator.

Once again, given the characteristics of creation as experienced, testimonies to divine suffering first announce divine self-limitation as the principal basis upon which to understand God's suffering.⁷ Christian theologians of divine suffering often discern two types of divine self-limitation. Following attestations to divine suffering, I have described these types as constitutional and volitional divine self-limitations.⁸ Examining these two types of divine self-limitation discloses a third

7. Langdon Gilkey criticized eschatological theologies, because their concept of God determines all creaturely history from the future, just as classical Christian theism's God had done from eternity, thus not genuinely addressing the problems of theodicy, human freedom, and the future's goodness. According to Gilkey, "these issues can be resolved only" with "an explicitly ontological doctrine of the self-limitation in every present of the divine power in relation to the freedom of the creature" (Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 235). Even otherwise quite Reformed, fundamentalist, North-American theologians have developed various versions of divine self-limitation as the presupposition to God's creative and re-creative activities (e.g., Erickson, *Word Became Flesh*, 607–12).

8. Numerous theologians identify these two types of divine self-limitation: see A. Strong, *Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism*, 88–90; idem, "God's Self-Limitations," 521–32; Gore, *Belief in God*, 115–18. Harold DeWolf identified three forms of divine self-limitation, though one could classify the latter two of these as constitutional and the former as volitional. He called them God's voluntary limitation, limitation by God's rational nature, and limitation by God's own being (DeWolf, *Theology of the Living Church*, 105–8). Henry Maldwyn Hughes developed notions of both *constitutional* (Hughes, *Christian Idea of God*, 152) and *volitional* (idem, *What Is the Atonement*, 91–92) divine self-limitation. Virginia Mollenkott perceived volitional divine self-limitation in the biblical narratives about Adam and Eve (Gen 1:26–28) as "caretakers of the world and cocreators of society" (Mollenkott, *Divine Feminine*, 77). Nonetheless, some theologians of divine suffering (for example, Marcel Sarot) regard the concept of divine self-limitation (as God's exercise of power to limit divine power) as nonsense. Marcel Sarot, however, replaces this notion with the idea of divine self-restraint: "God can resolve that he will not use His power in a certain way during a certain time, but He cannot limit His power" (Sarot, "Omnipotence and Self-limitation," 183). One must question, however, the very meaningfulness of Sarot's criticism of divine self-limitation, since self-restraint of any kind requires the exercise of the will or power.

phenomenon, that which serves as the final condition of possibility for divine suffering: *divine vulnerability*.

Constitutional Divine Self-Limitation

The concept of constitutional divine self-limitation describes the limits that divine being or life places upon the character of divine activity.⁹ The Christian symbol of divine suffering presupposes that divine perfection limits divine actions to those that remain congruent or consistent with divine being as love. In God's self-constitution, God limits Godself to the logic or rationality of love as *caritas*, to the values and praxis of love in that love's freedom, and to the divine Trinity as love. Divine action does not (although God retains the freedom or capacity to do so)

9. The concept of constitutional divine self-limitation solicits support from scriptural attestations to divine fidelity or constancy, the confidence that God will not deny the divine self (e.g., 2 Tim 2:13). Thus, although God remains capable of doing so, God does not change the divine character and will not, therefore, contradict Godself. Some theologians tie this biblical theme, most often connected to divine relationality or to the divine creator's covenant with creation, to the classical philosophical concept of immutability. Christian traditions that have been influenced by this philosophical idea also affirm the immutability of divine being. These Christian traditions, by far the dominant ones historically, also support their perspectives with biblical authority (see the key texts: Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8; and Jas 1:17). The commitment of these dominant Christian traditions to the classical philosophical concept of divine immutability also motivates their appeals to biblical declarations that Yahweh does not repent (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29). Through Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelian philosophies, this ontological conceptuality soon supplanted the relational and covenantal understanding of God's unchangeableness. In contrast to the philosophical concept of divine immutability, theologians of divine suffering affirm a notion of divine mutability that, nevertheless, emphasizes the fidelity of God to divine being; in other words, God's being will always remain divine, and yet God *chooses* not to contradict the divine self-actualization of that divine being (e.g., Hughes, *Christian Idea of God*, 152). Hence, Christian theologians of divine suffering often formulate the notion of constitutional divine self-limitation. "God's action must be limited by His character as Rational and Love. Moreover it follows from this, that the created order cannot attain two contradictory ends at the same time. It cannot, for example, be both a sphere in which free spirits are at liberty to seek good and attain fellowship with God, and also a sphere in which no mistakes are possible and every hardship and disaster is eliminated" (Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, 236; similarly, Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age*, 121–23). "That through bringing the universe into being God has subjected Himself to certain limitations is generally recognized. It is agreed, too, that His omnipotence does not mean that He can do absolutely anything, such as changing the past, but that He can do such things as are in harmony with His own Nature and Will" (Hughes, *Christian Idea of God*, 150).

contradict the character of divine being as chosen and actualized by the divine self, without undermining or negating that specifically chosen divine character.¹⁰ Nonetheless, God freely chooses the character of the divine being. Constitutional divine self-limitation simply reaffirms the constancy or fidelity of God to the divine self or to the character of divine self-actualization. God's action remains faithful to God's being, in that God's action actualizes that being and chooses to do nothing to contradict it. Thus, *constitutional* divine self-limitation provides the basis upon which God exercises *volitional* divine self-limitation in creative activity. In this form of divine self-limitation, God principally limits the divine self reflexively or for God's own sake.

Volitional Divine Self-Limitation

According to the Christian symbol of divine suffering, when creating, God limits the divine self in two stages. In the first stage, God *withdraws, constricts, contracts, or retracts* the divine self in order to allow a region of possibility to appear within God, within the divine *all-in-all*, in order to allow creation to possess a reality distinct from God. In the second stage, when God creates the creature, God endows the creature with being and life analogous to God's own life or being, in order to provide the creature with genuine alterity, with the capacity to relate to God as God relates; thereby, God *restricts* the divine self.¹¹

Both stages of God's self-limiting creative activity, consequently, entail negative and positive moments. Their negative moments consist in their limitation of the divine self. Nevertheless, the positive moments consist in divine creation of a creature who exists as truly other-than-yet-like-God and, thereby, who can potentially enrich the divine life through the proper use of this divine gift as well. In this sense, Kyle Pasewark helpfully described divine power as "the communication of

10. According to Vincent Brümmer, the essentialist tradition in Christian theology holds that, "since it belongs to God's essential nature to be good and faithful, it is 'logically' impossible for him ever to let us down." Brümmer understands this as a flawed perspective, one which "... takes God's love for us to be the result of an 'ontological' determinism." Brümmer, to the contrary, argues that "... it is incoherent to try to avoid the risk involved in loving God by denying God the ability to reject us or become unfaithful to us. We cannot thus avoid the conclusion that faith involves a leap" (Brümmer, *Model of Love*, 229, 230).

11. Moltmann also identified the two stages of volitional divine self-limitation (Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 110).

efficacy.” “The life and power of God are constituted in the benefits they provide the faithful, that is, the power of believers, which in turn emerges in the profit and power provided for the neighbor. Power of this kind can be described as a ‘communication of efficacy’”¹² Thus, in light of God’s possible enrichment through this volitional divine self-limitation, God also continues paradoxically to operate omnipotently, communicating efficacy to creaturely alterity. Nonetheless, God does not communicate efficacy without also establishing at least the possibility for the negative operation of power in creaturely freedom, an operation of power that can negate the purposes for which God communicates such power—both for creaturely alterity and for God. Of course, such concepts of divine self-limitation also implicitly distinguish between inauthentic and authentic operations of power. Moreover, both stages arise principally from the constitutional divine self-limitation of divine humility in the agapic dimension of the divine life or being.

At this point in my analysis, two central elements emerge, elements that attestations to divine suffering depict as aspects of a birthing process, aspects metaphorically ascribed to God in such attestations. I have described the first element in the divine birthing process as God’s creation of nothing (*creatio nihili*) or *divine self-retraction*, the first stage of volitional divine self-limitation. I have described the second element, with traditional terminology, as divine creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) or *divine self-restriction*, the second stage of volitional divine self-limitation: within the metaphor, as the birth of the creation from the womb of divine possibilities into the dwelling prepared for crea-

12. Pasewark, *Theology of Power*, 198. Unfortunately, Pasewark did not perceive the operation of power in the negative operation of divine self-limitation. He misunderstood consistent concepts of divine self-limitation. According to Pasewark (mistakenly citing Langdon Gilkey as a proponent of this concept), such positions hold that “. . . any claim that God is omnipotent, in light of God’s creation of something other than God, is senseless” (Pasewark, *Theology of Power*, 200). Consistent attestations to divine self-limitation, however, construe God’s creation of a genuine other (although not always in Pasewark’s language) as an operation of divine omnipotence in which God does communicate efficacy to creaturely alterity. Although consistent theologies of divine self-limitation already eschew concepts of divine power as domination, theologians espousing notions of divine self-limitation will benefit by considering carefully Pasewark’s critical proposal. Nonetheless, Pasewark’s own language about divine power often betrays its similarity to the language used by theologians of divine self-limitation: for example, “God’s omnipotence is defined by production of power that is not God, rather than by God’s sovereignty” (Pasewark, *Theology of Power*, 201).

turely alterity. I will examine and clarify their relationships to, as well as their differences from, one another in the following analyses.

Divine Self-Retraction: Creatio Nihili

For the Christian symbol of divine suffering, in the first stage of volitional divine self-limitation, divine self-retraction, God limits the divine self by moving from being the *all-in-all* to giving birth to, or to creating, a nothing, a space from which God has withdrawn in order to allow the creation to come into being. In this act, God actualizes self-sacrificially the divine being as love.

DIVINE ALL-IN-ALL

The Christian symbol of divine suffering confidently affirms that, before God created, God was in some sense *all-in-all*. One may recognize such confidence even in the theology of the apostle Paul, when he declares that, ultimately, even Christ will be subjected to God who had subjected all things to Christ, so that “God may be all in all.”¹³ Identifying and stating the assumption in Pauline piety adds clarity to his claim: Christ became subject to God, so that God might become *all-in-all*, as God had been both before the creation and before the eruption of sin through and into creation’s goodness. The Christian symbol of divine suffering assumes that God was *all-in-all* before the creation.

DIVINE CREATION OF NOTHING

Many attestations to divine suffering announce a divine act prior to God’s creation of anything, a divine act that established the condition of possibility for the emergence of something other than God through divine creative activity. God, the *all-in-all*, cannot create a creature distinct

13. 1 Cor 15:28 NAS. Some theologians question the extent to which God can ever become *all-in-all* again after the fact of creation, without the total dissolution or disappearance of creation. So long as creation persists in any form, God is not *all-in-all* in the most absolute sense. Nicolas Berdyaev rejected the notion of God as the *all-in-all*, as part of the conceptual network of God as “master,” “absolute monarch,” “the Absolute,” the cause that determines everything, the dominator, or “*pantokrator*”; Berdyaev correctly detected within this orthodox conceptual network “a pantheism which enslaves man” (Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, 82, 83, 85, 89, 90). Hence, the Christian symbol of divine suffering highly qualifies any eschatological understanding of God as *all-in-all*, in terms of the *reality* of the creation’s eschatological alterity.

from the divine self, until in some sense God provides a place or space, wherein that creature can truly become an other-than-God. Therefore, since God precedes creation as the *all-in-all*, God must in some sense withdraw the divine self in order for such an opening to appear. In this divine self-retraction, then, God creates a nothing inside the divine self, pulling back the divine self and, therefore, setting a limit upon the *all-in-all*. This nothing does not actively challenge God's being. Rather, it becomes a nurturing space within God. Thus, one more adequately describes the non-being that this nothing represents as a relative non-being, a nothingness of possibilities or potential. This nothing resembles a room or crib that God prepares for the not yet born or delivered infant of the pregnant divine mother.¹⁴

This moment in the concept of volitional divine self-limitation discloses a genuinely speculative logic in the first presupposition for the Christian symbol of divine suffering. Nonetheless, many attestations to divine suffering understand this conceptual moment as a mediating

14. One can trace this conceptuality to its origin in the Jewish theology of third-century Midrashic writings and thirteenth-century Kabbalistic mystical writings. The conceptuality originates in the central image of "*tsimtsum*," variously translated as "concentration," "contraction," "retreat," or "withdrawal" (see Kuhn, *Gottes Selbsterniedrigung in der Theologie der Rabbinen*, 47–60; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 260–63). Contemporary Jewish thinkers endeavor to retrieve this notion, both as a modern and as a post-holocaust theological resource: as examples, see Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, 1–90; Cohen, *Tremendum*, 89–91; Jonas, "Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice," 7–12; idem, "Is Faith Still Possible," 18. This conceptuality has affinities with some of the concepts in the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme and Meister Eckhart. Thus, a number of Christian theologians have retrieved elements from those sources as well: see Schelling, *Ages of the World*; Berdyaev *Destiny of Man*, chapter 2; idem, *The Divine and the Human*, chapters 1 and 2; idem, *Freedom and the Spirit*, chapters 5 and 6. In this connection, I also mention Paul Tillich's work, though relations in his thought to those mystical traditions become slightly more problematic. More recently, Christian theologies have begun to appropriate the Jewish concept of *tsimtsum* more directly: see Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 27–30, 59, 108–11; and Fritz, "A Midrash: The Self-Limitation of God," 704–5. Another Christian theologian expressed a similar view, although I have found no evidence that he relies directly upon Jewish or mystical Christian thought for it: "God has parted with his privilege of sole and only existence, in order that he may give room for other things and other beings; but this limitation is no derogation to his greatness, because it is *self-limitation*" (A. Strong, "God's Self-Limitations," 524). In some ways, the creation of this nothing also compares to fertilization of the womb. This analogy weakens, however, because in this metaphor the creation, as the child in the divine womb, must be born into, as well as from, the space or the divine nothing that God has prepared for the new child.

theological entailment between the symbol of God as the *all-in-all* and the symbol of God as divine sufferer.

At this juncture, however, the Christian symbol of divine suffering distinguishes divine self-retraction from two other related Christian understandings of God as both creator and sufferer. On the one hand, some testimonies to divine suffering construe creation as the result of tragedy within the divine life. On the other hand, some expressions of this symbol presuppose that creation originates from a divine struggle to overcome another pre-existent reality or principle.

To the contrary, first, according to relatively more adequate attestations, the Christian symbol of divine suffering does not construe creation as originating from some sort of a pre-creative divine tragedy. Some Christian witnesses to divine suffering posit a struggle within the divine life through which God generates the creation.¹⁵ No opposition within God, however, generates created reality in the most adequate Christian attestations to divine suffering. The creation does not result from divine emanations, emanations that yield a creature that in some sense remains divine though created. Thus, the Christian symbol of divine suffering reaffirms (and reinterprets) the orthodox Christian formulas: *non de Deo* and *de nihilo* or *ex nihilo*.¹⁶ The most adequate

15. From perspectives within the first and older Christian canon, "God is not a melancholy being who could find within himself the occasion for being dissatisfied or bitter" (Gerstenberger and Schrage, *Suffering*, 100). The concept of creation's origin in an internal divine struggle has affinities with ancient forms of Valentinian Gnosticism, wherein a crisis within the *pleroma* of the divine being causes suffering there and leads to the world's creation, as part of the salvific process necessitated by the divine tragedy (Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 174–205). One can find Christian versions of similar viewpoints in theologies that theologians base upon the concept of the *Ungrund* as developed by Jacob Boehme: see Boehme, *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, 1–37; Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*; Tillich, *Construction of the History of Religion in Schelling's Positive Philosophy*, 54–76; Berdyaev, "Introductory Essay: Ungrund and Freedom," v–xxxvii; idem, *Destiny of Man*, 23–25; idem, *The Divine and the Human*, 50–58; Elmore, "Theme of the Suffering of God in the Thought of Nicholas Berdyaev, Charles Hartshorne, and Reinhold Niebuhr," 17–71; Hartshorne, "Whitehead and Berdyaev," 71–84. When Tillich joined the doctrines of creation and fall to one another, as well as when he described the divine life as the eternal conquest of non-being, he approached a doctrine similar to that of the Gnostic divine tragedy that generates creation (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:186–89, 235–89). Also see Tillich's related analysis of the demonic: Tillich, *Interpretation of History*, 77–122; also see, Hartshorne, "Tillich and the Other Great Tradition," 245–59.

16. "Not from God" and "out of nothing" (Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, 2.28.48; *Confessiones*, 12.7.7; 12.8.8; 12.22.31; 13.33.48; *De civitate dei*, 12.1, 8; 14.11,

Christian testimonies to divine suffering perceive creation's origin in the divine desire to confer the gift of being upon a genuine other, in such a way that, though the other differs from God, God has endowed the other, nevertheless, with a being like the divine being.¹⁷ The nothing that God creates, though in God, is not God; rather, this created nothing constitutes that space in which the actual other-than-God might be created in such a way as to possess a distinctiveness, a creatureliness that one cannot identify as or equate with God.

Second, neither does the Christian symbol of divine suffering depict this divine self-retraction, or divine *creatio nihili*, as a pre-creative divine struggle with some form of pre-existent matter or mythical chaos-monster. The nothing of divine self-retraction remains a reality that divine action institutes. No other ultimate competitor, either personal or impersonal, stands against God. God alone limits the divine self and does that first in the sense of divine self-retraction. Even if one conceived this nothing of potentiality as some form of matter, then God would also have created it as such and it would, therefore, not stand against God as a negative factor that God must conquer or with which God must contend in order to remain fully divine. Nevertheless, the formula *non ex materia sed ex nihilo* implies the divine creation of this nothing of potentiality, as the denial of a pre-existent matter with which God had to struggle in order to create. Hence, this concept does not represent an ultimate dualism or pluralism. Everything that exists, including the nothing from which God creates, originates from God.¹⁸

13; 15.21; *De fide et symbolo*, 2; *De natura boni contra Manichæos*, 1). Also see Gilkey's interpretation and revision of this aspect of protology in Christian theology (Gilkey, *Through the Tempest*, 89–100).

17. Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, 58–66.

18. Jon Levenson attempted to demonstrate that ancient Israel's faith closely followed the faith of her ancient Near Eastern neighbors about creation: Israel's protology espoused the idea that Yahweh had defeated forces that had interrupted a "benevolent and life-sustaining order" and, as their conqueror, God has restored that order; but Israel's ancient creation-theology expressed nothing like the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. Thus, theologians cannot legitimately use Gen 1:1–2:3 to support that idea (Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 12, 47, 121). On the other side, some theologians defend the position that "even the remnants of ancient mythologies, such as the struggle with Behemoth or Leviathan, that are alluded to in various biblical passages apparently relate tensions generated by the Creation process itself rather than precosmogonic conflicts." Furthermore, some scholars who hold this position contend that, within the Bible, "God stands *beyond* the universe." Moreover, "[m]ythical descriptions in ancient