

He Really Can Mean It

Creatio ex nihilo is what Christians believe God did when He created the world and everything in it. It means “creation out of nothing.” Before God created there was literally nothing (no-thing) and then He made the things of the world come to be. God speaks the universe into existence. He brings it together and organises it over the six days of creation. This is a powerful example of God’s Word as a creating and making word. What He says comes to be. Many persons, including those who call themselves Christians, think it impossible that God should be able to do such a thing and especially they doubt that He should have been able to do it over six days of 24 hours as the plain words of Genesis 1 and 2 testify. People often want to talk God out of His self-revelation, talking Him off the ledge of His creating work: “*He can’t really mean it, can He? Don’t do it, God!*”

The doctrine of creation does not stand on its own. If we were to argue that maybe six-day creation does not matter all that much, we would be ignoring that the creation of the universe is perhaps the simplest of the divine acts, the easiest of His divine works. If God can’t create the universe out of nothing, what makes you think that He can save those in whom dwells no good thing? How can He make friends out of hardened enemies? How can He change those who do not fear, love or trust in Him? How can He raise those who are dead in their trespasses and sins? Monergism¹ in salvation is far more difficult than monergism in creation. First article gifts are a cinch in comparison to God’s second and third article works. Humans are much more difficult and intractable stuff for God to work with than the rest of the universe, because of our primeval rebellion.

One of the divine names that the saving God takes is the One who causes to exist things that do not exist. St. Paul when speaking of God’s salvation through the line of Abraham calls God the One “*who makes the dead live and calls what does not exist into existence*” (Romans 4:17). In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle also describes God’s willingness to take weakness, suffering and plain nothingness and turn it into something: “*God has chosen the lowly things in the world, the things that are despised and the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no one may boast before God*” (1 Cor. 1:28-29). The crucified Christ is exhibit one among the low and despised things in the world. So now we are getting right down to the crux of the Christian message. At its centre is the nothingness. If God can do such things as make to be out of nothing at the centre of our faith, in the article of justification, is it particularly rational to presume He could not create out of nothing in the article of creation and over a six-day span of time? Creation is easier than salvation. Both for God and for us. In some cancer therapy, patients must experience what is called lympho-depletion which destroys their immunity and brings them to the brink of death making them susceptible to other diseases. The patient is being brought down to nothing. Only then can the appropriate cancer therapy be applied. Much cancer therapy is precisely this kind of killing to make alive; just ask someone going through cancer therapy.

This is exactly what happens to the children of God in the therapy for sin. God destroys us. He kills us with the law in repentance. It becomes a complete denial of self. I tell people that I don’t want just to help them with their sin. I want to kill them. God wants to abolish the things that are (1 Cor. 1:28). I want to preach sinners to death with the Word of God. We may not take what is, namely our sin, and bring it along with us into God’s presence. Repentance leaves us dead on the table with our heart in the hand of the God who alone gives life. The Psalmist says, “*Your promise gives me life*” (Psalm 119:50). Only He can get our heart started. Where there is nothing, all that’s left is Christ, His life, and His mercy. He raises the dead, the dead like us. After killing us with our sin, God Himself brings us to life with the Gospel. When He calls on us to repent He makes us nothing. Then He gives us everything; calling into being that which was not. He really can mean it!

¹ Monergism is the view within Christian theology which holds that God works through the Holy Spirit to bring about the salvation of an individual through spiritual regeneration, regardless of the individual’s cooperation.