

# Creation and Kenosis

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## Abstract

The article examines the doctrine of Creation. It begins with a view according to which God simply starts a process off which then develops of its own accord. It then moves on to the idea of Creation being a continuous activity of God. Augustine's notion of a tune sung by God provides a beautiful illustration of the concept of continuous creation. God is singing us.

Augustine's image suggests something else. It confronts us with the notion of creation 'out of nothing,' a world spun from within like a song. It makes the point that God's work of continuous creation does not take place 'outside' Her, for there is nowhere that is 'outside' God.

These reflections strengthen the idea of God's self-giving love which is at the heart of a kenotic theology. God does not make something and then leave it to fend for itself. She remains not only passionately committed to its welfare but is constantly in the process of making and sustaining it.

A further point is that space and time are themselves part of Creation rather than being some kind of backdrop for God's creative activity. We are forced away from thinking of space and time as a pre-existent framework within which divine beings buzz up and down between heaven and earth. This may help us when we try to approach the specific question of a kenotic Christology. We must always begin our Christology with Jesus' development on earth, not with a presumed backstory about his life in Heaven.

## Introduction

What sort of metaphysical scaffolding is required in order to make sense of the idea that, as Donald Baillie put it, God was in Christ?<sup>1</sup> The scaffolding can be put up in various ways. For instance, it might be argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for making sense of the way God was in Christ without creating two gods. Or it might be said that only by understanding how God can be both immanent and transcendent can we recognise how God is both uniquely present in a single human life and yet beyond our understanding. The point of this article is to focus on the doctrine of

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Baillie, *God was in Christ* (London: Faber and Faber 1948).

Creation in the hope that it can contribute to our understanding of the self-giving that is at the heart of God's creative activity.

This article will concentrate on the doctrine of Creation before exploring how this may help us when we approach the question of kenosis. It will suggest that there is a danger of being misled by a certain understanding of Creation into thinking of two realms, a heavenly realm above and an earthly realm below. There is then a danger of treating salvation-history as an account of the traffic between these two realms. The article will conclude that a proper understanding of Creation can help us in approaching other aspects of Christian doctrine that might at first sight seem more central to a kenotic approach, but which in fact are crucially dependent upon a proper understanding of Creation.

### **God as Creator I: Avoiding Deism**

One of the most famous and controversial arguments for the existence of God was that given by William Paley in his *Natural Theology*,<sup>2</sup> in which he compared tripping over a stone when out walking on the heath with tripping over a watch. Tripping over a stone, one would simply assume that it had always been there but tripping over a watch one would immediately recognise it as an artifice and would presume that someone had made it. The world in which we live, Paley argues, is just such a watch that we 'trip over' in our daily lives and are led to suppose has some maker.

Paley's approach portrayed God as a watch or clockmaker who fashions an intricate timepiece which then ticks away merrily on its own. Such imagery presupposes that the world is a finished and self-sufficient object, something that once fashioned is able to survive on its own (with perhaps some occasional tinkering, for instance in order to rewind the watch, though doubtless the sort of perfect timepiece constructed by God would be self-winding) without any further intervention. By ruling out any divine interventions (assuming that God's perfect timepiece is indeed self-winding) it is assumed to be acceptable to 'modern science'. Science can sit comfortably with this Deist God who sets the whole thing going and then lets us get on with managing it for ourselves.

What is often seen as an example of a passing wave of thought associated with aspects of the Enlightenment can easily be dismissed as a theological Aunt Sally. But even if so, it is a persistent Aunt Sally. An example of such thinking can be found in the approach to theology of one of the world's most brilliant modern physicists, Stephen Hawking. At the end of the last century, he

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<sup>2</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology, or Evidence of the Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (originally published in 1802, reprinted in 2006 in a version edited by Matthew Eddy and David Knight as part of the Oxford World's Classics series).

produced *A Brief History of Time*,<sup>3</sup> a book which had colossal sales (ten million copies) and ensured that in future no bookshop would be without its 'popular science' section. In the book he recalls an instance when he met John Paul II in 1981:

*At the end of the conference the participants were granted an audience with the Pope. He told us that it was all right to study the evolution of the universe after the big bang, but we should not enquire into the big bang itself because that was the moment of Creation and therefore the work of God.*<sup>4</sup>

The remark made Hawking recall an earlier conflict between Pope Urban VIII and Galileo concerning the question of whether the sun orbited the earth. John Paul II seemed to be enthusiastic about the theory of the Big Bang (seen as consistent with the idea of a Creator God who effectively lights the blue touch paper that sets off the universe), but this caused Hawking some concern, because it was precisely the Big Bang theory that he was beginning to question at the time. The physicist continued (in a way that must be considered a little self-dramatising given the limited powers of a late twentieth-century pontiff):

*I had no desire to share the fate of Galileo, with whom I feel a strong sense of identity, partly because of the coincidence of having been born exactly 300 years after his death!*

Whether or not this is an accurate account of what the Pope said, it assumes a particular understanding of the concept of 'Creation'. Did Hawking think that this is what theologians mean when talking of God as 'Creator'? Later in *A Brief History of Time* he wrote as follows:

*With the success of scientific theories in describing events, most people believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started – it would still be up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator.*<sup>5</sup>

When Hawking was writing *A Brief History of Time*, he was beginning to have doubts about the views he had previously held concerning the Big Bang. He recalls that he wrote a paper in 1970 with the British mathematician and physicist, Roger Penrose, proving that there was a Big Bang singularity when most physicists had serious doubts about the idea. Ironically, however, having been

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (London: Bantam Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Hawking, 128.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 156-7.

the champion of such a singularity in the teeth of opposition in the 1960s, he found himself at the end of the 1980s changing his mind....

*I am now trying to convince other physicists that there was in fact no singularity at the beginning of the universe...it can disappear once quantum effects are taken into account.*<sup>6</sup>

Hawking was convinced that the undermining of the 'Big Bang singularity' entailed an undermining of the belief in God as Creator. By the time of his later book published jointly with Leonard Mlodinow and entitled *The Grand Design*,<sup>7</sup> he believed that that no initial 'putting together' was needed, and so for him religion's area of authority had effectively been undermined. On 2nd September 2010 the BBC duly carried a bizarre news release bearing the headline *Stephen Hawking: God did not create Universe*.

One can question whether Hawking's interpretation of Creation could ever be described as 'orthodox' Christianity, whatever the Pope might have said to the physicist behind closed Vatican doors! However, it seemed to provide a simple way of reconciling human progress towards autonomy and self-management with continued belief in God. This is the attraction of the 'two realms' idea, where it is made clear that 'God above' (in the heavenly realm) does not intervene or tamper with Creation (in the 'earthly realm' below). Humanity takes control 'down here', but God remains 'up there' and has an essential role in starting the whole process off.

The change in Hawking's view between *A Brief History of Time* and *The Grand Design* illustrates the dangers implicit in this essentially Deist understanding of God's relation to the universe. Once humanity is said to be in charge 'down here' and God remains 'up there', the danger is that God's role will become marginalised and eventually non-existent. Hawking adopted the view that 'so long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator'. Therefore, once he had determined that the universe did not have a beginning after all, the Creator's days (as it were) were numbered.

### **God as Creator II: Clocks, pots and continuous creation**

Hawking's suggestion is open to challenge. The challenge, it need hardly be said, is not to his insights into a beginningless universe, but to his view of what 'Creation' means in orthodox Christian thinking and to the whole 'two realms' thinking that lies behind it. Indeed, what is so striking about the whole debate is the way in which the most brilliant physicist of our day had such an old-fashioned 'Enlightenment' view of God's relation to the world, one which sits much more

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Hawking, and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (London: Bantam Books, 2010).

comfortably with the outlook of Isaac Newton than with the scientific discoveries of the last century. It seems to be the Deist God (one that is external and non-interfering) that is still taken out of the toolbox when people consider what 'God' means. Hawking's discussion in *A Brief History of Time* shows that even twenty-first century scientists think that they can make the Pope happy if God has a role in igniting the Big Bang, much as earlier generations thought it was enough that God had wound up the clock which then ticked away merrily of its own accord. Whether or not they believe in God, they seem to be willing to define the God who may or may not exist in fundamentally Deist terms.

Ideas of a craftsman fashioning a complex timepiece or of a potter making a pot – or even someone setting off a Big Bang - provide comprehensible and recognisable images. Hawking – and perhaps John Paul II - were simply reflecting what many people would probably regard as the traditional understanding of Creation, as represented by the famous beginning to the Book of Genesis. They would know that the six days of Creation or the seventh day of rest should not be taken as being a literal twenty-four-hour period. They might be aware of questions about the relation of Genesis 1 to the rest of the Pentateuch and the fact that it was not necessarily the earliest biblical account of Creation. Nevertheless, not least because of its place in tradition and in the history of our culture, they would register the idea of a God who gradually brings order out of chaos, realising a design and allotting functions to the various parts of it. This is what they would understand by the opening salvo of the Judaeo-Christian corpus, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,' the earth being 'without form and void' before the divine Spirit begins to work on it. Creation happens 'in the beginning,' God brings cosmic order out of chaos, after which the cosmic order develops under its own steam, much as the finished watch continues to tick or the finished pot sits on the shelf.

However, the idea that there comes a point where the universe, having been 'got going' in some way, continues under its own steam is misleading. Take the well-known biblical image used to describe God as Creator mentioned above, that of the potter. At first sight this seems rather like the image of the watchmaker, though with more of a sense of the fragility of humankind than is discerned in the watchmaker image. 'O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand' (Isaiah 64:8). In modern idiom, we are putty in God's hands. Isaiah 45:9 asks: 'Does the clay say to him who fashions it: "What are you making?"', once again stressing the subordination of the pot to the potter. Nevertheless, once the pot is finished it stands in the same relationship to the potter as the finished watch does to the watchmaker – it is self-sufficient. This remains the case even if each may need repairs from time to time. The watch might break, and the pot might develop cracks.

Yet the biblical image is not quite the same as that of the watchmaker. In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is sent to prophesy before some of the elders and senior priests by taking a potter's earthen flask and breaking it in their presence. This is a reminder both of the people's disobedience and of their complete dependence upon God. 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended' (Jeremiah 19:11). God can at any time destroy what She has made. It is a regular theme in the biblical text that God repents of having made the world because of the behaviour of Her people, seeking out a faithful remnant that will remain true (as in the story of Noah's ark and the Flood).

The God of Israel watches over the 'pot' in a way that the clockmaker does not watch over the clock. But the difference goes further. Take Jeremiah 18:2, which talks about clay that is spoiled in the potter's hand, whereupon he reworks it into another vessel. 'O House of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter has done?' asks God. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand so are you in my hand, O House of Israel' (Jeremiah 18:6). In other words, Israel is a pot that is still being fashioned on the wheel. There is no finished product. God's involvement with Creation is a continuous and passionate relationship which can be called off at any moment. If the hands of God cease to work at the wheel, then the clay will collapse into a stodgy mess. Creation will return to chaos. Implicit in this imagery is a view of continuous creation. There is no distinction between creation and maintenance – God's creative activity is what maintains the world in being; without that activity the world would cease to exist. Another analogy, taken from St Augustine, makes this clear.

### **God as Creator III: Tunes and Creation 'out of nothing'**

In his *Confessions* St Augustine uses a different model of Creation. Instead of a pot made by a potter, he suggests a tune sung by a singer. It is as if God did not make us and then leave us to fend for ourselves, but rather is constantly 'singing' us. Augustine wrote:

*For in time we do not first utter formless sounds without singing and then adapt or fashion them into the form of a song, as wood or silver from which a chest or vessel is made. Such materials precede in time the forms of the things which are made from them. But in singing this is not so. For when a song is sung, its sound is heard at the same time. There is not first a formless sound, which afterward is formed into a song; but just as soon as it has sounded it passes away, and you cannot find anything of it which you could gather up and shape.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XII, Chapter 29.

The analogy between the creation of the world and the singing of a tune makes two things very clear. In the first place, we have a clear expression of the idea that the world is not brought into being and then left to continue in a self-sufficient state like the 'completed' watch or the 'finished' pot. It exists only because of the singer's will to go on; there is no point at which the tune ceases to be completely dependent upon the singer's desire to continue singing (Augustine lived well before cassettes and recording studios). An image such as this effectively questions the distinction between creation as an initial act and then the act of maintaining or sustaining in being the created universe. The singer/tune analogy suggests an act of continuing creation as the world exists in unending dependence upon the God who makes it. As was pointed out above in the quotation from Jeremiah, Israel is a pot that is still being fashioned on the wheel. If we are like potter's clay, then we are like clay that is constantly struggling against the God who is ever moulding us anew; we are a tune that God chooses to go on singing, but at any moment God may stop the music.

The second implication of the singer/tune analogy is that the materials for God's creative activity do not pre-date the act of Creation. God does not 'look for something to make a world from' in the way that the potter looks for some clay and a wheel or the clockmaker searches around for wheels and cogs. This is reflected in the doctrine of Creation 'out of nothing' – *ex nihilo*.

There has been considerable debate about whether Creation out of nothing is the 'biblical' view of Creation (and of course there may well be more than one biblical view). Some biblical theologians think that the famous account of Creation in the first book of Genesis can be read as consistent with creation out of nothing (for instance by taking 'the heavens and the earth' of Genesis 1:1 effectively to mean 'everything', a view supported but not required by the fact that the Hebrew word for 'create', *bara*, is used only of activity carried out by God), while others think that it merely points to God's ordering role in bringing a cosmos out of a chaos.

Yet whatever the reception history of the Genesis narrative, there is a certain logic to Augustine's insistence that Creation must be 'out of nothing', since God could hardly be constrained by the properties of the material She had to work with, working up a sweat trying to make the clay pliable. One can see why theologians are drawn to claim that God is not acting upon pre-existing matter that is older than Creation itself. 'There is not first a formless sound, which afterward is formed into a song', says Augustine in the passage quoted above. Nor, one might say, is there a potential Big Bang waiting to happen when God lights the blue touchpaper.

Augustine's singer/tune transforms our idea of what God's creative activity might be and, by implication, our idea of what God might be. It rejects the idea that God in creating works upon materials external to Herself – the clay, the wheel, the metal instruments, the formless chaos.

Augustine's image brings out the continuing dependence of the world upon God, but it does so in a particular way. Consider another model that certainly emphasises the world's dependence on God, that of the myth of Atlas. The mythological story of a world held in place by the titan Atlas (although Atlas was originally condemned by Zeus to hold up the sky in order to prevent it from re-establishing its primordial embrace of the earth) certainly presents a model of the world as continuously dependent upon there being a god to 'hold it up'. But the image of Atlas represents a world that is dependent upon something *outside* itself. In the tune image of Augustine, it is more that the world is being spun from within as the singer gives voice. The world may be given a certain autonomy, a certain character as a 'finished product', the physical universe that in the Genesis story God saw to be good and then rested after making, but it is not an autonomy that can be conceived as taking it 'outside' God.

In a figurative manner, this can be seen in the case of potters and watchmakers too. Imagine the exhausted sculptor who, having finally chipped to perfection, remarks: 'I put all of myself into that work.' But the prevailing sense of those images, unlike that of the tune, is still of a separate finished product, now self-sufficient while it ticks away or stands being admired on a table top.

Something more than the dependence portrayed by the image of a universe held up on Atlas' vast shoulders is implied by passages in the Bible like Jeremiah 23:24 - 'Do I not fill Heaven and earth?' The point is that God is sustaining the world *from within*. One of the traditional attributes of God, after all, is 'omnipresence', and God can hardly be 'omnipresent' without being 'down here' as well as 'up there'. 'Do I not fill Heaven and earth?' This cannot be the absent God (however 'enabling' through absence) of Deism.

We therefore come to the following conclusion. When the idea of Creation is freed from its Enlightenment straitjacket, it can be understood in a very different manner. The universe is no longer an independent 'finished product', which is the impression one easily gets from pots and watches. Just as the tune depends on the singer's desire to sing on, so the world depends upon God's desire to go on creating and sustaining it. Whatever truth there may be in the idea that God gives Creation 'relative autonomy', allowing human beings to sin and reject their Creator, there remains a need for God's constant creative and sustaining activity in order for the universe to continue in being. God does not stop at the edges of the world because without God the world would not continue to be.

The tune image gives God an immediacy that pots and clocks deny. The song cannot be separated from the singer (at least in Augustine's day) in the way the pot can be separated from the



potter. The image stresses the immanence, the 'within-the-worldness', of God, without whose constant presence the world would no longer exist.

#### **God as Creator IV: Time and space as part of Creation**

Augustine made another point about Creation which is profoundly significant. In Book XI of his *Confessions*, he says that it is crucial to understand that Creation is not 'in' time because time itself is a part of Creation. This is the mistake, Augustine argues, of those who ask what God was doing 'before' Creation,<sup>9</sup> as if there was an empty stage which remained bare and unused until God 'arrived' to fill it with light and scenery. It is also the mistake of those (like Hawking) who thought of Creation as something that happens in the first few minutes (or nanoseconds) with some kind of 'Big Bang'.

It is easy to imagine the time before Creation in terms of a moment when all is quiet on stage. The curtain has not yet gone up. But there is still a stage there, still a curtain, still lights waiting to go on and actors waiting to tread the boards. There is an expectant audience there too. And then...the show begins. Creation. The Big Bang. But Creation was not something that God brought along to the darkened stage on which some strange pre-existing forms waited expectantly for the play to begin. All the forms that emerged with Creation emerged alongside space and time which were *part of* that Creative activity. Time and space exist only in relation to the things that happen 'in' them. There was nothing 'before' Creation, because 'before' only makes sense in the context of Creation itself: there is nothing 'outside' what God has created, no heavenly realm 'above' it, because 'outside' and 'above' only make sense in the context of the created world. There are no two realms, because realms only exist where there is Creation and as a part of that created universe.

Augustine's idea that time and space are part of God's work of Creation, rather than some kind of eternal backdrop to 'God's first intervention', does not fit well with Newtonian science or with the classical physics of the Enlightenment. However, it fits much better with Einstein's theory of relativity, as several recent and contemporary theologians have pointed out. The point is made very well (for all that one might have doubts about his overall theological position as an exponent of Barthian neo-orthodoxy) by Professor T. F. Torrance. In *Space, Time and Incarnation*<sup>10</sup> he argues that in order to throw off our Enlightenment shackles we must give up what he calls a 'receptacle' view of space and time. Torrance explains that when we talk of our planet or solar system as being 'in space', we all too easily think of space as a gigantic container inside which the planets orbit around

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, op cit., Book XI, Chapter 13.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

each other like flies in a jam jar. He even suggests that ‘there may well be at work here a substitute symbolism arising out of post-natal desire for the security of being at home in a container and anxiety at being thrust out into the open world...’<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, the ‘receptacle’ view creates difficulties – for instance in being able to cope with the obvious question of what is ‘outside’ the container. It also means that we commit ourselves to a view whereby our activities ‘inside’ space are believed to be entirely independent of space itself. The same is true of time, which we are also said to be ‘in’. Time becomes a backdrop to our activities which is entirely unaffected by those activities themselves. We can go quickly or slowly ‘in time’, but time itself is not affected by our actions. The jam jar goes on being a jam jar whatever the flies are doing inside it, however many there are, whatever the speed at which they happen to be buzzing around and so on. Meanwhile time marches on, irrespective of whether the jar is full of flies or empty. Time and space are separated from what happens inside them – precisely the sort of separation that lures us into supposing that into a ‘quiet’ world in which ‘nothing was going on’ God suddenly appeared with a box of tricks in order to set off the Big Bang. The Creator comes along to the eternal, pre-existing jam jar and pops in a few flies.

Modern science (as Torrance understands it) can change the whole narrative by rejecting the ‘receptacle’ image according to which God creates something external to Himself and is then seen as constantly meddling in it. We need an approach in which there is no perforating or interfering from ‘outside’, not because of some presumption that God thinks it better not to interfere or doesn’t want to ‘trouble’ us with miracles but because ‘outside’ belongs only to the created order. The point is that space and time are wrapped up in the events that go on inside them; the events are wrapped up in space and time. That is what ‘created’ means, but if so, as the next section tries to suggest, it has profound implications for what is traditionally termed ‘salvation-history’ and for the central event in that history with which a kenotic approach is particularly concerned, the Incarnation.

### **Creation and Kenosis**

The idea of space and time being part of Creation prepares the metaphysical framework for understanding the central Christian concept that God was in Christ. It does so by stressing the inappropriateness of viewing what might be called salvation history in terms of a series of divine visits from afar, a series of actions by the God who is outside or above. The Incarnation cannot mean that Christ chose ‘from outside’ a particular point of entry from where He could ‘get into’ the world and stay there for three years until forced to find a particular point of exit. This is a vitally important point, since we are easily misled by talk of Incarnation into thinking in terms of some salvific sky-dive from heaven down to earth, when we should be thinking in terms of Jesus of Nazareth becoming

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<sup>11</sup> Torrance, 22.

conscious of his identity and mission. In other words, the focus should be upon Jesus of Nazareth trying to understand (to put it crudely) what is going on in his life. It is out of the reflections about the meaning of his life on earth by a Jew without the slightest conception of having temporarily vacated heaven that even such statements as 'Before Abraham was, I am' emerged.

What I am questioning is the idea that Jesus of Nazareth could simply reach back in his mind to the point where he left that other realm to make what Karl Barth entitled 'The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country'<sup>12</sup>. It is this that a kenotic understanding must avoid, since it can easily be grafted onto the two-realms hypothesis by stressing that the Son must have chosen to abandon, or simply decided not to use, those divine attributes which he had in heaven (how far one should go between concealment and abandonment was to divide kenoticists into various schools of thought from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards).

The danger is that kenoticism, intended to stress the self-emptying of Incarnation, surrenders one of its main strengths by giving the incarnate Christ all the settled advantages of knowing where he has come from. He knew himself only as an unpopular Nazarene trying to adapt to circumstances he couldn't wholly understand. He was overwhelmed by the uncertainty of his situation, driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit to work it out, confronting demons for forty days, perhaps including his own demons. If, eventually, Christianity arrived at a view that this was God the Son on earth, it was because of a certain insight that Jesus' suffering and uncertainty, rather than confirming his status as another puzzled human being among millions of others, was intrinsic to the life of God Himself, and that in his mere humanity he had been assumed into that life in ways that seemed to be beyond all comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

Twenty years ago, a fascinating collection of essays by scientists, theologians and other academics was published called *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*.<sup>13</sup> The overall approach of the book was to link the self-emptying of Christ outlined in the famous 'Christological hymn' of Philippians 2:5-11 with the self-emptying of God in Creation. This article has tried to explore and perhaps take further some of the themes explored by the contributors to that book. Hopefully, as suggested at the beginning, it will help us to consider what sort of metaphysical scaffolding is required to make sense of the idea that, as Donald Baillie put it, God was in Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV, Part One, Chapter XIV, translated G. W. Bromiley, and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) 157-211.

<sup>13</sup>J. Polkinghorne, ed. *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans 2001).

Hence it is as part of trying to establish a viable framework for a kenotic understanding of Christ that this article has looked at the doctrine of Creation. It began with a view according to which God simply starts a process off which then develops of its own accord. God winds up the watch or finishes the pot and puts it onto the shelf. This might from a theological perspective be seen as a long-rejected form of Deism, but if so it remains a common fallacy, one that clearly represented Stephen Hawking's understanding of Creation when he talked about it to Pope John Paul II (who it must be said seemed to have the same idea).

The article then moved on to insist upon Creation being a continuous activity of God rather than something that only applies to some notion of lighting the touchpaper or firing the starting pistol. Augustine's notion of a tune sung by God provides a beautiful illustration of the concept of continuous creation. God is singing us. We depend upon Her continuing the song. It is like the music of the spheres, and should it ever cease we will cease with it.

But Augustine's image suggests something else. It confronts us with the notion of creation 'out of nothing'. Whether or not this is the 'biblical' view based on the study of the text of Genesis, it appears to emerge naturally from the imagery Augustine adopts. The potter needs clay to work on and a wheel at which to sit and work. The watchmaker needs cogs, wheels a powerful eyeglass and a studio. The materials would seem to predate the work of creation. But the singing of a tune suggests something different, for here is something that is spun from within.

At this point we move beyond the idea of continuous creation being something like God's continuously sustaining the world from outside it, holding it up like Atlas. The notion of creation out of nothing, of creation without having to reach for available materials, suggests a world spun from within like a song. It makes the point that God's work of continuous creation does not take place 'outside' Her, for there is nowhere that is 'outside' God.

These reflections arguably strengthen the idea of God's self-giving love which is at the heart of a kenotic theology. God does not make something and then leave it to fend for itself. She remains not only passionately committed to its welfare but is constantly in the process of making and sustaining it. She gives it relative autonomy – otherwise Creation would be no more than a mere extension of God, an 'emanation' as some early theologians saw it. Yet it remains a universe only sustained in being through the fact that God permeates it with Her presence. Images of God as 'Light' and as 'Being' make this point in their different ways. So does the idea of God as 'transcendent and immanent', which means to say not that God somehow alternates between being 'down here' and being 'up there' but that it is precisely as transcendent that God is continuously present with us on earth. All that one wants to say about God loving the world, being involved with

it to the point of being continuously hurt by it and seeking its redemption as a process inseparable from realising Her own eternal nature as Love is contained in the idea that Creation was spun from within and exists in being only because God determines to continue singing what is at once a song of joy in Creation and a condition of maintaining the created order in being.

The final reflection in the article was that if there is nowhere 'outside' God and nothing like the 'right time' for Her to begin the work of Creation, we have to understand how space and time are themselves part of Creation rather than being some kind of backdrop for God's creative activity. The advantage of this approach is that we are forced away from thinking of space and time as a pre-existent framework within which divine beings buzz up and down between heaven and earth. This may help us when we try to approach the specific question of a kenotic Christology. Even from a kenotic perspective, the article suggested, we are constantly being misled into thinking in terms of a salvific sky-dive from heaven down to earth. The kenoticist who adopts such an approach only differs from other more supposedly 'orthodox' interpretations by wondering whether the skydiver takes all his equipment with him when he leaves heaven or whether he chooses to leave some of it behind – or perhaps takes it with him, keeps it concealed about his person and then refuses to use it. None of this is appropriate. Jesus of Nazareth struggles to understand his position in life (to which the stress upon his temptations in the desert and perhaps even the lateness to the start of his ministry might attest), and he does so without being pervaded by the sense that he once existed somewhere else. We must always begin our Christology with his development on earth, not with some kind of presumed backstory about his life in Heaven.

It is not, then, as if Jesus of Nazareth starts remembering a strange past in which he was an active member of some kind of heavenly triumvirate. There may be in the language of the creeds much that suggests movement 'up' and 'down', but we don't want to end up treating salvation-history as an account of the traffic between two realms. Instead, we should be thinking as the later Athanasian Creed did in terms of humanity when it has been assumed by God. Then when we try to make sense of the notion that 'God was in Christ' it is more as if he becomes increasingly aware that his own life as the son of a carpenter can be seen in other terms, as God making room for Herself on earth, wrapping Herself up in the specificities of creative forms like time and space, the Light illuminating the world in the power of a single beam.

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