

God's Perfect Love: Why an essentially relational God can create *ex nihilo*

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Abstract

My aim in this article is to present a middle path between open theism and process theism, by arguing that an essentially loving God must be understood to have only perfect love-power and that this power is coherent with the affirmation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. I philosophically explore the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and argue that an essentially, perfectly, and eternally loving God always relates and loves Creation even if God created *ex nihilo*.

Creation from nothing need not be understood as entailing oppressive power. It does not entail contrastive and coercive power. Instead, I suggest that a God of essential love-power always works for the flourishing of God's Other – the Creation – a Creation that has always been part of God's loving and eternal plan. Contrary to what many process theologians have claimed, I maintain that belief in an essentially loving God of kenotic love-power is coherent with belief in *creatio ex nihilo*.

In the first step, I outline the philosophical meanings of relationality and love and analyze their relation to God. In the second step, I examine how notions of divine power and relationality are related. I then connect them and argue that they cannot be understood separately, and conclude that an essentially loving God *can* create *ex nihilo*.

Introduction

In this article, I philosophically analyze and reflect on the nature of God as wholly and utterly loving. My project is to outline a coherent account of divine love – traditionally framed in terms of perfect goodness, or omnibenevolence – and argue that divine power and divine love ought to be understood as two sides of the same coin. When doing so, one can embrace the traditional doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and believe in perfect, eternal, and divine *relational love*.

The term omnibenevolence is sometimes rejected since it works only in one direction:

From God to Creation. Omnibenevolence, as a word describing God's goodness, is quiet about how goodness, relationality, and love are responsive, and affect God back. For this reason, I prefer not to use the term "omnibenevolence" when describing God. However, I suggest a way of relating omnibenevolence to the *relational love* preferred by most open and relational theologians. I

suggest that love is the most perfect relational expression of Goodness. Love, by nature, is a relational process that affects and changes the subjects, which entails that love is a process in time.¹ Conceptualizing God as perfect Goodness entails, in that case, that God is perfectly loving as well, since love is the active and relational expression of Goodness itself. Goodness without an effect or outcome is meaningless and nonsensical. Therefore, when goodness is actively expressed, it has an effect and an outcome. It is also relational in character, because the source from which the goodness springs and the subject or object that receives it are different. Understanding love as the highest form of goodness leads to understanding God as perfectly relational and loving. Love is the active and creative dimension of Goodness, clearly seen and felt in the Holy Spirit as God's creative and active dimension in Creation.²

The claim that God creates *ex nihilo* is typically rejected by process theologians, who argue that relationality is necessary to God and that divine relationality is logically incompatible with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. I will suggest otherwise and show that belief in a perfectly and essentially loving God is still compatible with the belief that God created the universe from “nothing”. The “nothing” in this context is meant to entail *nothing other than Godself*. If God created the universe from nothing, then God did not use external components or ontologically separate “stuff” in making the world. I will return to this and also consider the possibility that God eternally creates from that which God previously created.

I proceed through three steps before concluding that an essentially and perfectly loving God *could have* created the world *ex nihilo*. The first step is to outline the philosophical meanings of relationality and love and to analyze how these concepts relate to God. The second step is to examine how notions of divine power and relationality are related. I will then connect them and argue that they cannot be understood separately, and conclude that an essentially loving God *can* create *ex nihilo*.

God, relationality, and love

In this section, I attempt to answer the question *What is love?* However, I will not offer a historical or genealogical overview of the concept of love; rather, I will focus on how open theists and process theists typically conceive of God's love. The reason is that these two versions of theism offer opposing views on the nature of God's love, which, in turn, affects how they conceive of God's

¹ Thomas Jay Oord, *Pluriform Love: An Open and Relational Theology of Well-Being* (SacraSage Press, 2022), 34.

² Lina Langby and Martin Langby, “The Holy Spirit and Kenotic Loving Power,” *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 2, no. 78 (2024): 180–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2024.2350706>.

power. When contemplating whether an essentially loving God can create the world *ex nihilo*, these thoughts have greatly influenced the debate and led many to side with either process theism or open theism, depending on their conclusions about the nature of divine power and love. My aim is to bridge the two forms of theism, showing that an essentially loving God could, in principle, have created the world *ex nihilo*. I will, however, not argue for open theism, but try to show that there is an appealing middle path.

Open theism was first presented in 1994 as a Biblical conception of God by theologians Clark H. Pinnock, William Hasker, John Sanders, Richard Rice, and David Basinger.³ Open theists typically hold that God, in contrast with classical theism, is affected by time, that God does not have foreknowledge, and that the future is open.⁴ Open theism agrees with process theism on several crucial points regarding the God–world relationship, but differs most significantly on the question of the nature of God’s power. Open theists defend traditional omnipotence and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, while process theists reject both.⁵ Open theists and process theists alike focus on the essential love of God as being primary, but reach very different conclusions regarding whether such a God can create from nothingness.

Open theists, being necessarily a Christian form of theism (as opposed to process theism, which has Islamic versions, even though it started as, and is most developed as a Christian form of theism), argue that God satisfies the relational criterion entailed in love by relating internally in God’s trinitarian self.⁶ The three persons of the Trinity love and relate to each other and could have remained without a contingent Creation, if God so had chosen. The Creation is, according to open theism, a free choice by God the Creator – a choice that equally well could have not been realized.

This view of God’s love as relational within God’s trinitarian self shapes how open theists understand God’s power. Since the world could not have been, it is wholly contingent. First, there was only the Trinity; then there was also Creation. This entails that God, according to open theism, used

³ Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (InterVarsity Press, 1994).

⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (InterVarsity Press, 1994).

⁵ David Basinger, “Practical Implications,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (InterVarsity Press, 1994); Richard Rice, “Process Theism and the Open View of God: The Crucial Difference,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb and Clark H. Pinnock (Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 150–51; Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 108–10.

God's omnipotence to create, that is, God used divine power to unilaterally bring something about from nothing.

In contrast, process theism denies omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo*. According to process metaphysics, developed by the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead and later by theologians Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, and others, God is not the only agent with creative power. Given the core claims of process metaphysics, God always relates to an actual world and cannot override the self-determination and will of actual entities.⁷ Moreover, process metaphysics holds that *all* entities are occasions of experience that affect and are affected by other occasions of experience. Everything is related, even God.⁸ Whitehead describes this by saying that God is "in unison of becoming with every other creative act. Thus, by reason of the relativity of all things, there is a reaction of the world on God."⁹ In summary, process metaphysics entails that God, like everything else, is essentially relational and involved in the everlasting process that constitutes reality.

For process theologians such as Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, and Thomas Jay Oord, adherence to these metaphysical core claims entails rejecting both omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo*.¹⁰ Oord has argued extensively that omnipotence is logically incompatible with an essentially loving God because, while love necessitates freedom, responsiveness, and relationality, omnipotence entails a unilateral one-way kind of power.¹¹ For Oord and process theologians like him, it is the inherent relational aspect in love that makes them reject both omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo*, because both omnipotence and *creatio ex nihilo* are taken to imply a one-sided, unilateral, coercive activity with no need for a relational response. In contrast, my aim is to show that belief in *creatio ex nihilo* is coherent and compatible with belief in a God of essential love.

A fruitful way to conceive of God's power and love is to focus on the Holy Spirit as God's active love and creativity in Creation. In the Bible, God acts and creates through the Holy Spirit.¹² God

⁷ See David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Cornell University Press, 2001), 5–7.

⁸ Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 79.

⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corr. ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Wynne Sherburne (The Free Press, 1978), 345.

¹⁰ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (State University of New York, 1984); Thomas Jay Oord, *God Can't: How to Believe in God and Love after Tragedy, Abuse, or Other Evils* (SacraSage, 2019); David Ray Griffin, "Process Theology and the Christian Good News," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Eerdmans, 2000).

¹¹ Thomas Jay Oord, *The Death of Omnipotence and Birth of Amipotence* (Sacrasage Press, 2023).

¹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *A Shorter Guide to the Holy Spirit: Bible, Doctrine, Experience* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 10.

gives life by sending the Spirit (Ezek 37:14, Gen 1:2, Gen 2:7), and the Spirit is the source and ground of all life. God creatively acts through the Holy Spirit.¹³ Moreover, the Spirit works to promote the “common good” (1 Cor 12:7), because the Holy Spirit is God’s active, relational love-power. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). The activity of the Spirit is relational, because it depends on our responses. The Spirit gives life (Gen 2:7, Ezek 37:14), and the Spirit acts in humans to accomplish the good. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). It is clear that the love-power of the Holy Spirit is relational and that it wants and awaits a response. The question is whether *omnipotence* is a suitable word to describe this relational love-power?

No other divine attribute has received so much critique and debate as omnipotence. I, too, find reason to reject omnipotence as a suitable way of understanding God’s power since it *a.)* does not leave room for the relational aspect of power and love, and *b.)* bears connotations of a masculine and dominant kind of power.¹⁴ Omnipotence focuses on the *ability to do anything*, or anything logically possible, or anything that does not contradict the nature of God. This, I claim, says very little about who God is and how God acts. If the focus is not on omnipotence but on the relational Holy Spirit, we can see that the Spirit is God’s loving and empowering activity.¹⁵ The Spirit infuses Creation with life and creativity, so that we can respond to God’s love and act to fulfill the union of Creation and God.

The relational dimension introduces a sense of vulnerability. Love necessarily entails vulnerability – the risk of loss, hurt, and separation. However, love also entails the possibility of blissful union. Two aspects are crucial to notice here. First, love is relational because love necessitates a beloved. Second, the vulnerability is also an aspect of God’s loving power. God desires a loving and restored union with Creation, making God’s love-power vulnerable. Divine love-power makes agency and activity possible because the *Other* in the relationship must be able to respond. Divine love makes life and freedom possible.¹⁶ God wants the creation to respond to God’s love and offer. However, since love is inherently relational and vulnerable, God cannot unilaterally coerce us to respond to God’s love. This is the kenotic dimension of divine love-power. God loves the radical

¹³ Thiselton, *A Shorter Guide to the Holy Spirit*, 11; John T. Carroll, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Abingdon Press, 2018), 112.

¹⁴ Amy Allen, “Rethinking Power,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 1 (1998): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01350.x>.

¹⁵ Langby and Langby, “The Holy Spirit and Kenotic Loving Power,” 184.

¹⁶ Oord, *God Can’t*, 27–28, 96.

Other – the Creation – and constantly works to fulfill the union of Creation with the triune Godself, but does not coerce its subjects.

The insight from process theism, that God’s inherent relationality entails a limitation on what God can do, is worth keeping in mind. I, too, argue that an essentially loving and therefore relational God cannot intervene or act so as to overrule and annihilate the subjectivity of creatures.¹⁷ Besides the crucial question of how to know or determine how far subjectivity stretches (all the way down to electrons, as in process metaphysics, or if we should stop somewhere else), the central question here is whether *creatio ex nihilo* really is incompatible with the proposed kenotic love-power. I propose that they are compatible, and that belief in an essentially loving God ought not be the reason to prefer process theology (although I am not saying that there might not be other good reasons for favoring process theology).

In the remaining parts of this article, I explore the possibility that God is not only a Creator but a necessary Creator, and I claim that this conclusion follows from God’s nature as perfectly and essentially loving and expressing only love-power.

God necessarily creates

If God’s power is a kenotic love-power for the radical Other, as previously suggested, it has implications for how we can coherently conceive of God as Creator. The question to be answered now is whether a God of essential love-power can be thought to have created the world *ex nihilo* (from nothing) or if the essential relational nature of God as love necessitates God to always be in relation to that which is *not* Godself. I will argue that the essentially loving God model is also coherent with affirmation in *creatio ex nihilo*.

The meaning of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is expressed clearly by Thomas Aquinas:

If someone holds that something besides God could have always existed, in the sense that there could be something always existing and yet not made by God, then we differ with him: such an abominable error is contrary not only to the faith but also to the teachings of the philosophers, who confess and prove that everything that in any way exists cannot exist unless it be caused by him who supremely and most truly has existence.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lina Langby, “God’s Kenotic Love-Power – a Defense of Relational Theology and the Vulnerability in Love,” *Sophia* 64, no. 2 (2025): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-024-01053-7>.

¹⁸ Quoted from Daniel Soars, “Creation in Aquinas: Ex Nihilo or Ex Deo?,” *New Blackfriars* 102, no. 1102 (2021): 952–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12603>.

In debates between open theists and process theists, this is often the key question that divides the two. As described above, open theists typically argue that God's relationality is eternal in God's trinitarian self: God relates to the other persons in the Trinity and, by free will, chooses to create the world.¹⁹ Process theists typically argue that, metaphysically, God always relates to some "world" because God's essential relationality presupposes something to relate to other than Godself.²⁰ The latter position is taken to entail a rejection of creation *ex nihilo*.

Because God is essentially loving, and because "love by nature does not manipulate, dominate, or dictate in ways that allow no response,"²¹ Oord concludes that God creates everlastingly from that which God has previously created. This is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but a creation out of love for that which eternally is not Godself.²² This claim is built around core claims inherent in process metaphysics, but also the core belief in God as wholly and perfectly loving. Since love is an inherently relational process, God must always be in a loving process with *someone*. According to this process relational response, if God created the world *ex nihilo*, then God has not eternally been in such a relationship. Following this process-theistic argument, the conclusion is that God cannot have created the world from nothing, because something must be co-eternal with God.²³ Process theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki puts it like this:

Creation is therefore not *ex nihilo*, but from multiple sources. Every moment is created by God, by a particular past, and by each occasion itself as it responds to these influences. In a sense, it is a dancing universe in partnership with God in the ongoing beauty of creation. In this dance, the world is in some respects responsible for itself.²⁴

However, a process-theistic argument against *creatio ex nihilo* is built on more than the premise that God is essentially relational. In fact, I argue that reference to divine love is not even necessary in a process-theistic argument against *creatio ex nihilo*. If nothing (*nihil*) exists, God has nothing on which to exercise either coercive or persuasive power. It is not an oppressive or unloving power, because there is nothing on which the power acts. In other words, process theological arguments against *creatio ex nihilo* follow from the metaphysics of process philosophy, a rich

¹⁹ William Hasker, "An Adequate God," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Eerdmans, 2000); Hasker, "A Philosophical Perspective"; Pinnock, "Systematic Theology."

²⁰ Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*; Oord, *Pluriform Love*.

²¹ Oord, *God Can't*, 26–27.

²² Oord, *Pluriform Love*, 176, 186–92.

²³ Oord, *Pluriform Love*, 198–99.

²⁴ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "God, Trinity, Process," *Dialog* 40, no. 3 (2001): 172, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0012-2033.00072>.

metaphysics that theists, in this context, have no reason to accept. Therefore, we must reflect further on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and whether it must be rejected in favor of belief in an essentially loving God.

Theologian Daniel Soars analyzes Thomas Aquinas's ideas and argues that *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex deo* (from God), in fact, are synonymous.²⁵ God is not a cause among others. God is the primary cause without which there are no other causes. From the affirmation that nothing can come from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), we can conclude that the world, which is clearly something, has God as its primary and ultimate cause. If the world cannot come from nothing, but still exists, it comes from God. The *nihil* in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not a sheer nothingness as if that meant "absence of being." God, in Christian dogmatics, is Being itself and the ground of Being.²⁶ Nothing could have come into existence if there were not even a *ground of Being* in the first place.

Far from being an exception to the rule, the God-world relation is the most important example of the principle *omne agens agit sibi simile* [the principle of similitude] because God is the primary cause and, as such, produces effects which analogically resemble God. It is only a short logical step from here (if any kind of step at all) to affirm that all created effects (viz. the world) must be pre-contained in their supreme cause (God) or, to put it in the slightly more daring terms not unknown to some medieval Christian mystics, that the world exists 'in' God. Effects cannot emerge out of sheer nothingness, and *creatio ex nihilo* insists that the world does not come from some-one-thing either: it can, therefore, only come from God. It seems that *creatio ex nihilo* is synonymous with *creatio ex deo*.²⁷

The medieval discussion, involving thinkers such as Avicenna (980-1037), Al Ghazali (1058-1111), Maimonides (1135-1204), and Aquinas (1225–1274), etc., centering on the question of divine emanation, "became framed disjunctively as one between necessary emanation and free creation."¹⁴ Soars points out that Aquinas did not regard creation and emanation as opposite alternatives but as complementary, without implying that God and the created world exist on the same ontological level; they do not, according to Aquinas (or Soars). Essential to both Aquinas and Soars when contemplating the ontological nature of Creation is the fact that God *constantly* sustains it. God is the

²⁵ Soars, "Creation in Aquinas."

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. David McClamrock, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, n.d.), I, Q. 11, Article 4, www.freecatholicbooks.com.

²⁷ Soars, "Creation in Aquinas," 957.

fundamental cause and reason for the world's existence.²⁸ However, God and the world can be in a genuine relationship without them existing on the same ontological level.

The question, nevertheless, remains: did God create the world by free will or by necessity? This question uses logical language that, I suspect, causes more alarm than it needs to. I want to claim that God creates by necessity, just as God loves by necessity and exists by necessity. In other words, God necessarily loves because *it follows* from God's nature as essentially loving. God, therefore, necessarily creates because it follows from God's nature as love, because love requires a beloved *Other*. Aquinas writes that "[...] to create belongs to God according to His being, that is, his essence, which is common to the three Persons."²⁹

Theologian Brian D. Robinette, like process theologians, is sympathetic to understanding God's love and power as non-coercive. However, he also defends omnipotence and argues that much of the critique of omnipotence is unwarranted, as it rests on a misinterpretation of its meaning (he particularly directs this critique at theologian John Caputo). "The alterity of God is wholly pacific and generative, limitlessly nurturing and empowering of contingent creation. *This* is how to understand the abstract idea of 'omnipotence.'"³⁰ He then rhetorically asks, "Must unconditioned transcendence be fatally at odds with God's nearness? Must omnipotence even be at odds with vulnerability?"³¹

For pragmatic, feminist reasons articulated by several feminist philosophers and theologians, I believe that omnipotence is laden with connotations that are unfruitful for a community and a theological context that seeks flourishing, creativity, love, and inclusion.³² Well aware of counter-critique, stating that omnipotence does not logically entail oppressive power,³³ I still think that omnipotence has a historical backpack, too heavy to carry. That said, I do not think we need to discard the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, nor is there any need for everyone to convert to process theism. To see why, Robinette helpfully claims that "The 'power of God has no precondition outside

²⁸ Soars, "Creation in Aquinas," 962.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 45, Article 6.

³⁰ Brian D. Robinette, "The Difference Nothing Makes: Creatio Ex Nihilo, Resurrection, and Divine Gratuity," *Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (2011): 538, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391107200303>. Emphasis added by the author.

³¹ Robinette, "The Difference Nothing Makes," 532.

³² E.g., Nancy Frankenberry, "Feminist Philosophy of Religion," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2018, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/feminist-religion/>; Pamela Sue Anderson, "Feminist Challenges to Conceptions of God: Exploring Divine Ideals," *Philosophia* 35, nos. 3–4 (2007): 361–70, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-007-9083-7>; Margaret Daphne Hampson, "On Power and Gender," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 3 (1988): 234–50.

³³ Peter Byrne, "Omnipotence, Feminism and God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37, no. 3 (1995): 145–65, JSTOR.

itself,' no 'object' against which it must strive, no 'antithesis' to which it is tied. 'Power' is not a univocal concept that can apply equally to God and creature."³⁴ He argues that we should view *creatio ex nihilo* not as entailing oppressive and contrastive power, but as noncompetitive and noncontrastive. *Creatio ex nihilo* means that creation is a free gift from God, fully dependent on the Creator and not in conflict with God to become itself.³⁵

If God is essentially and eternally loving – and this I take as an axiomatic truth – then creation has always been part of God's will and plan. This does not entail that creation exists on the same ontological level as God, nor that creation is co-eternal with God. This claim only means that an essentially loving God essentially and necessarily *relates to a beloved and wants unity and a flourishing relationship*. Even if the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is accepted, we can coherently believe that the God who created from nothing is essentially relational/loving because the eschatological union of God and Creation has always been part of God's plan. Just as parents are already in a loving relationship with their unborn child, God can be conceived of as in an eternal relationship with Creation. In contrast to open theism, I thus argue that Creation is necessary, but God's creative act – if it were a *creatio ex nihilo* – need not be understood as oppressive and contrastive. Creation is necessary because God necessarily relates to a beloved, but Creation may still be the result of *creatio ex nihilo* if it eternally has been part of God's loving plan. I maintain that we must reject the idea that God can have oppressive power, power that negates the Other's subjectivity. However, as I have argued, this affirmation does not entail a denial of *creatio ex nihilo*.

This ties in with the understanding known as "Cosmic Christology". Theologian Anna Case-Winters describes Cosmic Christology as entailing that the *Word* from the prologue in the Gospel of John is identified with Jesus Christ as fully God ("the Word was God"), that the Word is *preexistent*, which is to say that the Word/Christ is eternal, and not dependent on the incarnation, and finally that the Word/Christ is the cause and origin of everything that exists ("Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made". (John 1:3)).³⁶ Cosmic Christology puts emphasis on the connection – and identification – of the one who creates all with the one who saves. 1 Colossians 1:16 claims of Jesus that "all things have been created through him and for him." Of particular importance to Cosmic Christology are also 1 Col. 19–20: "For God was pleased to have

³⁴ Robinette, "The Difference Nothing Makes," 538.

³⁵ Robinette, "The Difference Nothing Makes," 544.

³⁶ Anna Case-Winters, *God Will Be All in All: Theology through the Lens of Incarnation* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2021), 13.

all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

Since a cosmic Christological mindset emphasizes the eternal and pre-existent nature of Christ as Saviour and Redeemer, it encourages understanding the incarnation not as an emergency solution for God, but as cosmic in scope, and as eternally willed by God. In other words, Creation has always been part of God’s eternal, loving plan.

The incarnation lies in the primordial creative intent of God, and it is related to the whole of creation prior to any role in redeeming humankind. The goal of creation is to be found in its relation with God—its union with God (*theosis*).³⁷

An essentially loving God is essentially relational, but this does not imply that we must reject the doctrine of creation from nothing, for God has always loved and related to Creation.

Summary

In this article, I began my philosophical reflection with the axiomatic belief in God as essentially and perfectly loving. From that, I argued that it follows from God’s nature that God is the necessary Creator of all. My aim has been to show a middle path between open theism and process theism, by arguing that an essentially loving God must be understood to have only perfect love-power. God’s power can never be oppressive. It only and always works to empower, promote, and enhance flourishing and love. I also argued that God’s love-power is relational, and that it never overrules or negates creaturely selves. This, however, does not mean that we must reject *creatio ex nihilo*. Creation from nothing need not be understood as entailing oppressive power. It does not entail contrastive and coercive power. Instead, I have suggested that the God of essential love-power always works for the flourishing of God’s Other – the Creation – a Creation that has always been part of God’s loving and eternal plan. Contrary to what many process theologians have claimed, I maintain that belief in an essentially loving God of kenotic love-power is coherent with belief in *creatio ex nihilo*.

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³⁷ Case-Winters, *God Will Be All in All*, 14.

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