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978-0-521-51868-0 - Creation and the God of Abraham

Edited by David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice and William R. Stoeger

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CREATION AND THE GOD OF ABRAHAM

Creatio ex nihilo is a foundational doctrine in the Abrahamic faiths. It states that God created the world freely out of nothing – from no pre-existent matter, space or time. This teaching is central to classical accounts of divine action, free will, grace, theodicy, religious language, intercessory prayer and questions of divine eternity and, as such, the foundation of a scriptural God but also the transcendent Creator of all that is. This edited collection explores how we might now recover a place for this doctrine and, with it, a consistent elucidation of the God of Abraham in philosophical, scientific and theological terms. The contributions span the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and cover a wide range of sources, including historical, philosophical, scientific and theological. As such, the book develops these perspectives to reveal the relevance of this idea within the modern world.

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Castel Gandolfo, the venerable summer residence of popes, has for over three hundred years been home to the Vatican Observatory. In recent years the Jesuits who run this very ancient and, at the same time, very modern institution have hosted successive gatherings of scholars exploring the interrelations between science and faith. It was during one of these that William Stoeger, S. J., and Janet Soskice got to speaking about *creatio ex nihilo*. This teaching, central to the theology of the early and medieval Church, is crucial to the traditional doctrine of God and not in any way in tension with modern science, yet its potency and sophistication, we considered, has been strangely overlooked by the modern science and religion dialogue. A conference seemed called for. *Creatio ex nihilo* has the further advantage of being a place of convergence for all the religions of radical monotheism. Because of this, Bill and Janet immediately thought to ask David Burrell, C. S. C., to be part of the planning team. David was delighted at the opportunity to bring Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars together – philosophers as well as theologians and scientists. Carlo Cogliati's gracious response to our invitation to be *amanuensis* for the group assured genial proceedings, as his introduction displays so well.

Our hope was that bringing astute thinkers from Judaism, Christianity and Islam around a common table – some of them old hands at science and religion debates and others not – would help restore the dialectical interaction of faith and reason proper to each of these traditions. Our hopes were met beyond our wildest expectations, largely due to the composition of the group itself and the stunning setting of the Vatican Observatory whose historical gravity and sheer beauty decidedly enhanced our reflections on creation. The hospitality of the resident Jesuit community of the Vatican Observatory, especially that of the then director, Fr George Coyne, S. J., assured that our conversations would be undertaken in a receptive atmosphere.

As it turned out, Jewish and Christian interlocutors proved to be somewhat older than the Muslims, yet significant differences in age or experience

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made little difference to our conversations. The editors asked that the final chapters reflect the discussions of the week to allow readers to profit from our explorations, properly revised for publication. Carlo Cogliati is very much to be thanked for the bulk of the work pulling the volume together so beautifully. We also make honourable mention of Oliver Soskice, for editorial assistance at a critical moment.

Before turning readers over to the feast prepared for them, we need to announce a proper *kadish* for Professor Peter Lipton who with his wife and intellectual companion, Dr Diana Lipton, graced our gathering but was himself taken from us suddenly before the volume could be completed. May the God of Abraham be with them and with the other participants of these graced days.

DAVID B. BURRELL
AND
JANET M. SOSKICE