

The Early Church Fathers on Creation Out of Nothing

The Early Fathers taught that God created everything out of nothing. They were not superstitious. They could see the miracle that life was. They also knew that the world around them was anything but simple. They believed that our complex universe was the creation of an intelligent being and not the result of a series of random accidents. They were also familiar with Scripture. In the book of 2 Maccabees, we read: "I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus, also mankind comes into being" (7:28).

Hermas

Believe first of all that God is one, that he created all things and set them in order and brought out of nonexistence into existence everything that is, and that he contains all things while he himself is uncontained (*The Shepherd*, 2:1:1 [A.D. 80]).

Clement of Rome

By the word of His majesty did He establish all things; and by His word He is able to destroy them (*Letter to the Corinthians* [A.D. 95]).

Aristides

Let us proceed, then, O king, to the elements themselves, so that we may demonstrate concerning them that they are not gods but corruptible and changeable things, produced out of the nonexistent by him that is truly God, who is incorruptible and unchangeable and invisible, but who sees all things and changes them and alters them as he wills (*Apology 4* [A.D. 140]).

Justin Martyr

Is there any intelligent person who will dispute the contention that we are not atheists, when we worship the creator of everything that exists? (*First Apology* 13 [inter A.D. 148-155]).

Tatian the Syrian

Our God has no introduction in time. He alone is without beginning and is Himself the beginning of all things. God is a spirit, not attending upon matter, but the maker of material spirits and of the appearances which are in matter. He is invisible and untouchable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things (*Address to the Greeks 4* [ca. A.D. 165-175]).

Theophilus of Antioch

Furthermore, inasmuch as God is uncreated, he is also unchangeable; so also, if matter were uncreated, it would be unchangeable and equal to God. That which is created is alterable and changeable, while that which is uncreated is unalterable and unchangeable. What great thing were it, if God made the world out of existing matter? Even a human artist, when he obtains material from someone, makes of it whatever he pleases. But the power of God is made evident in this, that he makes whatever he pleases out of what does not exist, and the giving of life and movement belongs to none other but to God alone (*To Autolycus* 2:4 [A.D. 181]).

Irenaeus

Men indeed are not able to make something from nothing but only from existing material. God, however, is greater than men first of all in this: that when nothing existed beforehand, he called into existence the very material for his creation (*Against Heresies* 2:10:4 [A.D. 189]).

Tertullian

The object of our worship is the one God, who, by the word of his command, by the reason of his plan, and by the strength of his power, has brought forth from nothing for the glory of his majesty this whole construction of elements, bodies, and spirits (*Apology* 17:1 [A.D. 197]).

Clement of Alexandria

God creates all things by the Word ... And how could creation take place in time, seeing time was born along with things which exist (*Stromata* 6:16 [A.D. 208]).

Hippolytus

Then shall the righteous answer, astonished at the mighty and wondrous fact that he, whom the hosts of angels cannot look upon openly, addresses them as friends, and shall cry out to him, "Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? Master, when saw we you thirsty, and gave you drink? You Terrible One, when saw we you naked, and clothed you? Immortal, when saw we you a stranger, and took you in? You friend of man, when saw we you sick or in prison, and came to you? You are the ever-living One. You are without beginning, like the Father, and co-eternal with the Spirit. You are he who made all things out of nothing" (*Discourse on the End of the World* 43 [A.D. 217]).

Origen

The specific points which are clearly handed down through the apostolic preaching are these: First, that there is one God who created and arranged all things and who, when nothing existed, called all things into existence (*On First Principles* 10:4 [A.D. 225]).

Cyprian

[The mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs said:] 'O son, pity me that bore you [nine] months in the womb, and gave you milk for three years, and nourished you and brought you up to this age; I pray you, O son, look upon the heaven and the earth; and having considered all the things which are in them, understand that out of nothing God made these things and the human race (*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11 [A.D. 253]).

Methodius

All things are placed under you [God] as their cause and author, as he who brought all things into being out of nothing, and gave to what was unstable a firm coherence; as the connecting band and preserver of that which has been brought into being; as the framer of things by nature different; as he who, with wise and steady hand, holds the helm of the universe (*Oration on Simeon and Anna* 6 [A.D. 305]).

Lactanius

Let no one inquire of what materials God made those so great and wonderful works, for he made all things out of nothing. Without wood a carpenter will build nothing, because the wood itself he is not able to make. Not to be able is a quality of weak humanity. But: God himself makes his own material, because he is able. To be able is a quality of God, and, were he not able, neither would he be God. Man makes things out of what already exists, because he is... of limited and moderate power. God makes things from what does not exist, because he is strong; because of his strength, his power is immeasurable, having neither end nor limitation (*Divine Institutes* 2:8:8 [A.D. 307]).

The Apostolic Constitutions

For you [Father] are eternal knowledge, everlasting sight, unbegotten hearing, untaught wisdom, the first by nature, and the measure of being, and beyond all number; who brought all things out of nothing into being by your only begotten Son, but begot him before all ages by your will, your power, and your goodness, without any instrument, the only begotten Son, God the Word (8:2:12 [A.D. 400]).