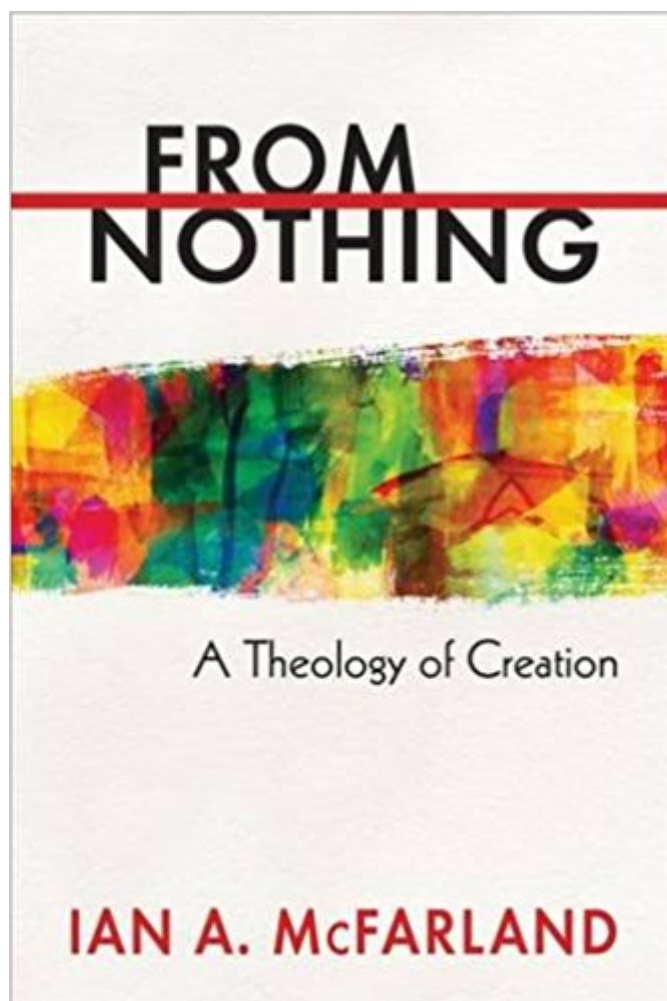


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From Nothing: A Theology Of Creation



Synopsis

Too often the doctrine of creation has been made to serve limited or pointless ends, like the well-worn arguments between science and faith over the question of human and cosmic origins. Given this history, some might be tempted to ignore the theology of creation, thinking it has nothing new or substantive to say. They would be wrong. In this stimulating volume, Ian A. McFarland shows that at the heart of the doctrine of creation lies an essential truth about humanity: we are completely dependent on God. Apart from this realization, little else about us makes sense. McFarland demonstrates that this radical dependence is a consequence of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, creation from nothing. Taking up the theological consequences of creation--theodicy and Providence--the author provides a detailed and innovative constructive theology of creation. Drawing on the biblical text, classical sources, and contemporary thought, *From Nothing* proves that a robust theology of creation is a necessary correlate to the Christian confession of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Westminster John Knox Press (August 8, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 066423819X

ISBN-13: 978-0664238193

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #73,763 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #48 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Systematic](#) #94 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Science & Religion](#) #1427 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology](#)

Customer Reviews

"Acknowledging forthrightly both the exegetical and philosophical problems posed by the church's doctrine of creation from nothing, this well researched and cogently argued study makes an impressive case for why faith in the trustworthiness of the triune God who creates all things in Christ may be shown to provide a deeper understanding of what creation entails than either its ancient or recent alternatives. Once again McFarland has demonstrated how a first rate critical engagement with the sources of Christian doctrinal traditions can constructively address some of today's most

vital issues." --Christopher Morse, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics, Union Theological Seminary, New York

"This is a masterful account of God as creator, the world as creation, and how the 'as' in each case shapes how to live both in God and in the world. This is 'doctrine of creation,' not from the perspective of a defensive crouch before scientific skepticism on one side or 'rational design' on the other, but from the perspective of the fundamental importance of the idea of creation for faithful living and thinking. God creates from nothing; Ian McFarland constructs theology of creation out of a rich mix of conversations with Scripture, the history of Christian thought, debates about science and theology, and an ecumenical chorus of theological voices. McFarland's superb theological craftsmanship always keeps the book clear, engaging, and wonderfully illuminating." --David H. Kelsey, Luther Weigle Professor Emeritus of Theology, Yale Divinity School

"Ian McFarland has produced one of the most substantial contributions in recent times to the theology of creation. Rooted in Scripture and church tradition, yet always alert to contemporary challenges, his study offers an important defense of the classical *ex nihilo* doctrine. By describing its vital function for Christian thought and action, he shows how it is not a quasi-scientific hypothesis but an essential part of an account of the ways in which all creatures are sustained and loved by God." --David Fergusson, Professor of Divinity and Principal of New College, University of Edinburgh

"McFarland's monograph is arguably the most serious retrieval of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in recent systematic theology. He successfully dispels the accusation that the doctrine necessarily implies an arbitrary God, and convincingly argues, through christological refocusing, that this key affirmation of Christian faith proclaims how the Creator is 'not only inexhaustibly rich in God's self, but also endlessly profligate in sharing this divine plenitude with creatures.' Through careful rereading of biblical texts and lively conversation with patristic and other sources from the Christian tradition, we are treated to a fresh and incisive analysis of divine transcendence, freedom, providence, and love for the contingent, created 'other.' McFarland furthermore tackles a wide array of philosophical and theological challenges facing the doctrine of creation in modern and postmodern thought, and will thus stimulate many conversations of its own in areas as diverse as ecological theology, sacramentology, and theological aesthetics, to name a few." --Paul M. Blowers, Author of *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford, 2012)

Ian A. McFarland is Associate Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs and Professor of Theology at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He is the author of several books, including *In Adam's Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin and The Divine Image*:

Envisioning the Invisible God.

McFarland's *From Nothing* is a robust theology of creation with its focus on the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo (creation from nothing) and its important implication for how we understand theology and the world which we share with the rest of God's creation. The introduction provides a fantastic overview of how the doctrine came to be. Here the author explores the doctrine's defense by two very different theologians: Basilides (who was a gnostic), and Theophilus (who was not). The difference in their understanding is crucial. Basilides believed that God was not intimately involved in the creating of the world, but rather created a "seed" from which the world, "of its own accord, without any divine stimulus or intervention" (8) emerged. This allowed God distance from the matter which, according to Platonic thought, was evil. Theophilus, on the other hand, believed that God was directly involved with the creation of the world. McFarland explores not only the opponents of the doctrine in the early church but in our day as well (primarily among process theologians). As the author's theology unfolds you will find a rich Trinitarian theology that shapes every angle of his tightly woven thesis. McFarland (who is a professor at Emory) is obviously deeply rooted in the Patristic and seems, in particular, to have regular interaction with Aquinas. The first section of the book explores the three elements of the doctrine by chapter: 1. God; 2. Creates; 3. From Nothing. Here we find the great distinctions between the unknowable God who makes Himself known, and His creatures. We also find the great similarities between creatures, in particular our similarity in being created. Our creation is not, however, from a God who is removed from His creation (as Basilides proposed), but is the outcome of Trinitarian love. One of the implications, according to the author, is that humans are not "ontologically closer" to God than any other creature, rather, our distinction is our function (drawing heavily from Maximus the Confessor at this point). For those concerned with God seeming tyrannical (not least process theologians), McFarland explicates on the understanding of power from (again) a Trinitarian perspective. "Divine power is not something that needs to be taken or hoarded, which is how we fallen and finite creatures tend to conceive of power; rather, it is exercised in giving. God is supremely powerful as the one who bestows power" (96, 97). In the second section of the book the author explores potential theological challenges that ex nihilo might present to the reader and carefully walks through each of them. In the final chapter he speaks of "glory" and writes, in particular, on icons and

eucharist. *From Nothing* is a very dense book but is certainly worth the time and effort if you are interested in the theology of creation. Different from many books on the topic, it is very much a Christian perspective (rooted in John rather than Genesis, for example), and provides a wonderful Trinitarian framework.

Exceptional presentation of the doctrine of creation, especially the inclusion of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel.

This book is a major contribution to the theology of creation from a broadly Barthian perspective. McFarland is encyclopedic and masterful in his carefully reasoned argument, both with respect to biblical materials and the long and complex history of theology on this topic. He contends, against much contemporary liberal theology (e.g., process and feminist theologies), that the traditional doctrine of creation ex nihilo, though not literally and explicitly biblical, best expresses the most profound biblical witnesses to the world as God's creation. But it does not, he contends (against mainstream liberal criticism), entail an arbitrary monarchical deity, nor does it lead to oppressive ethics and social practices. Rather, he argues that it frees theology from certain difficulties inherent in the liberal perspective, and affirms that the world is utterly dependent on God while yet free to be itself. McFarland is thus also able to affirm the extraordinary findings of modern science (about which he is remarkably well informed), especially cosmology and evolutionary biology, while maintaining a robust and profound theological perspective. The book concludes with a fascinating and insightful chapter on eschatology, in the form of glimpses into the eschaton from within creation.

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