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## MODULE 5

### Creation

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In this module, we are going to learn about Luther's theology of creation and practice the fun of being a theologian by thinking and imagining about God.

For centuries theologians have entertained the question of “how” and “why” God created.

#### A) Creatio ex nihilo

As to the “how” of creation, the traditional Christian answer to which Luther also subscribed is that God created out of nothing. God produces matter without using anything of her own self nor any pre-existing material. Stepping out of her spirit, God opens a space outside of her being for something completely different than herself.

#### B) Creatio ex materia

A different view is that God created out of some pre-existing material, from a substance distinct from God, but that, as God, already existed, even if only in the form of chaotic, disorganized matter, incapable of sustaining living creatures.

#### C) Creatio ex deo

The third main answer has been that God created out of her own being. According to this view, since God is all there is before creation, that is the only substance that can provide the seeds of creation. If God is everything, there is no nothingness out of which to create.

Christians have privileged the notion of creation ex nihilo because it gives us a way to explain bodily resurrection. God's power to create things out of nothing is the same power that creates life out of death.

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Regarding the question of why God created, a wide-accepted answer is that the creation of alterity is what opens the space for a relationship of love. God creates in order to love. Let's think about this: If God loves, she feels for the suffering of her creatures, to the point that she might wish the possibility for suffering had never been created in the first place. God herself may wonder: “Why did I give birth? Why did I go through the pain? Was

it really my wish that I become a Mother?" Think about the problems that as humans we have created: poverty, pollution, war, human trafficking, animal testing: What cosmic plan could possibly make up for the suffering and anguish that accompanies the experience of being alive? Who would be such a coward as to justify a cosmic purpose in the presence of the victims? Can any Heaven compensate for the atrocities suffered now?

Imagine God in a time prior to creation. What could she be doing? Was she already pregnant with creation? Was she thinking about her creation? Was thinking even a possibility before God's coming into and though cosmic matter? (By the way, I have started to call God "she" because I am able to identify more with her that way, but you know, on some days I might feel more like a "he" or a "they" or a "ze"... I would like to keep all those possibilities open for God as well).

When I think about a time prior to creation, I like to imagine God entertained with her own thoughts, having no need for a garden with animals; no need for light nor for separation between light and darkness; I see a God that is everything at once through her thoughts; everything, except a Creator for there is no Creation yet. But how could God become what she was not already? She must have been creating in some way! She must have been creating, at the very least, thoughts, creative thoughts, thoughts of creation! Some of them being so complex and entangled within each other that they started creating molecules out of themselves, and cells! Self-organized systems made out of heritable structures! What an amazing thing!

Maybe God was simply curious to see what would unfold of that unplanned, life giving thought she once had. Creation was an accident of curiosity. Maybe, the pleasure generated by that act of creation was so overwhelming that even God was unable to think about stopping! There is nothing more pleasurable than love! As God saw her child growing still inside of her, she fed it with her best nutrients, and imagined all the possible futures of the yet to be born universe. Words of divinity made it official: let there be light, and there was light! God appreciated what she had done. She enjoyed the company. She felt love for all the children that grew out of her. She was proud of them, and eager to see their development in time, for that is how creation had to be constrained in order to happen: it had to exist in time, and, as such, never completely revealed, not even entirely to God.

Luther avoids the question of what God was doing before Creation. About what human reason cannot know, we should rather stay silent. But humans can learn something of God through her creation. In his explanation of what it means to pray "Give us this day our daily bread," Luther affirms that God provides us with everything that is necessary for the continuation of our lives: food, drink, clothing, and also friends and societies. How come that some people are left without food or clothing? That happens not because of God but because of humans, who have the unhelpful ability to not reflect God's caring love in their dwellings in the world. As we know, Luther thought that humans are sinful no matter what, so that any offer of salvation must be completely independent from what humans can offer.

Now, let us take a look at the creation narratives. If you haven't read them yet, I encourage you to stop the video and do that now.

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The creation narratives of Gen 1, likely written under Babylonian rule, and of Gen 2-3, supposedly older, composed under Salomon's rule, have been used in many points in history for ill-intentioned purposes. They have been used to justify colonization and exploitation of natural resources; to affirm the dominion of God's obeying peoples over other nations; and to proclaim the inferiority of women within a hierarchical conception of reality that posits the white male as the highest point of creation. In our study of Genesis it is important to be aware of the violence that has accompanied the Christian reading of the book, so that we do not participate in its perpetuation, but rather allow the liberating spirit that lives through the words written by a people under captivity and to still speak to us today. I look forward to the questions and themes that you would like to discuss as we interact the forum. For now, let me highlight three topics that have been of special interest lately for theologians working on a theology of creation: climate justice, gender equality, and the relation between religion and science. You can find good contributions to all of these topics in the LWF Booklet "Creation – Not for Sale."

The topic of climate justice draws our attention to the various ways humans have not been taking care of creation. The topic is related to the question of social justice as well, as vulnerable groups - the poor, the migrant, children, the elderly, as well as other vulnerable species - are the most exposed to the harmful consequences of climate change. Gen 1 verse 28 states that humans were told to "subdue" the world and "have dominion" over the earth. If we think of the biblical text as an expression not only of forms of eternal, divine wisdom but also of modes of being human in time – which are always circumstantial and less than perfect – we may draw the conclusion that the verse expresses that which humans saw to be the case: they did exert dominion over creation, and - as dinosaurs could just as well have concluded in their era if they had written narratives of creation -, humans posited themselves as not only authorized but as expected to exert dominion over the rest of creation (which was done quite well if we consider our current ecological crisis). - God has given us the capacity to become aware of our harmful presence, and with such awareness comes the responsibility to change our ways as to become a healing, creative, life-oriented presence on earth. The orientation for the proper relationship with the rest of creation is offered by Genesis itself. Genesis 2:15 speaks of "cultivating" and "keeping" the earth (Gen 2:15). The book of Genesis affirms that the universe was created by the divine will for life-giving relationships. God thus desires a life-sustaining communion with this creation. This affirmation contradicts the conception of God as being self-sufficient and absent from creation, controlling it from outside or above. God has an intimate relationship with all of creation and is present in creation. In the liturgy we praise God with the words of prophet Isaiah: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:3). Isaiah declares that God's presence fills the whole earth, which is God's sanctuary. Martin Luther wrote how God is present "in, with, and under" all things: "God is substantially present everywhere, in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and He fills all, but without His being encompassed and surrounded by it...How can reason tolerate it that the Divine Majesty is so small that it can be substantially present in a grain, on a grain, through a grain, within and without...His own divine essence can be in all creatures collectively and in each one individually more profoundly, more intimately, more present than the creature is in itself, yet it can be encompassed nowhere and by no one" (Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This is my Body', etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics", in LW, vol. 37, 59-60). God is thus the source of all being

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rather than the observer who intervenes from outside. God's incarnation in Jesus shows God's intimate relationship with creation. Jesus tells his disciples to go "into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). The Good News of God's reconciling and life-giving communion is thus not meant only for human beings. The new creation, grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, encompasses all of creation.

The question of gender relationships occurs later in Genesis 3 where men's dominion over women is being affirmed. Here, again, we see the justification of a human system that finds itself already in place, the system of patriarchy. Gen 3.16 states that men will rule over women. Gen 1 offers us an alternative reading inasmuch as the woman is not created after the man but both are created equally in the image of God. As humans we all share a common place of origin: the uterus. As a Garden of Eden, the uterus is experienced as a place of love and care, but it can also be scary and traumatizing to find oneself completely vulnerable to the knowledge and power of creation of somebody external to ourselves. Out of fear, humans have rebelled against the bodies that generated them, and instead of welcoming the uterus as a space of creation in freedom, transformed it into a burden, a law that kills: women were told that it is their function to generate children, and that the entirety of their being is defined by such function. Observing the ways humans' reproductive organs are arranged, men and women were told to be essentially different, an assumption that has been nothing more than an excuse to exclude women from positions of leadership. This is a mistake that needs to be urgently corrected, and Luther himself can offer us some help in that. In his Lectures on Genesis he writes: "[Adam and Eve's] partnership involves not only their means but children, food, bed, and dwelling; their purposes, too, are the same. The result is that the husband differs from the wife in no other respect than sex; otherwise the woman is altogether a man." Differentiation between male and female according to Luther is a result of the Fall: "If the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects. For the punishment, that she is now subjected to the man, was imposed on her after sin and because of sin." As a result, she "has been deprived of the ability of administering the affairs that are outside [the home] and that concern the state." By now we know of the multitude of cultures and their infinite ways of constructing gender identities to say that the ideas of men and women, to which social spaces they belong or not, are very relative. Humans are allowed the creative freedom to decide with which gender they identify beyond a traditional, binary, heteronormative conception of gender, and Luther, although he will never be an LGBT model for anyone, still allows us to feel inspired by his gender-free paradise.

The last topic that I would like to mention is that of the relation of religion and sciences. From the sciences we learn so many fascinating things about the ways organisms interact and how their lives develop from within one another. Think, for instance, about the creative mystery entailed by the transformation of an egg into a bird. Think about the bird and its courage in opening its wings for its first flight. The more we learn about the world that surrounds us the more we open ourselves to the mysteries of God's creation as it continues to take place all around us. At the same time, knowledge demands responsibility. Scientists have not only found cures for diseases, but also developed pesticides and other chemicals harmful to human beings and the environment. Luther's skepticism of reason, choose passage. An ethical orientation that chooses life over profit

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is crucial if we are to embrace Luther's vision of "deep incarnation," as Barbara Rossing writes, which calls us "to care for the earth and all its communities of life."

### Further reading:

- *Creation – Not for Sale*, Anne Burghardt (ed.), Lutheran World Federation, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig, 2015: [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-2017\\_booklet\\_creation.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-2017_booklet_creation.pdf)
- Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis. Chapters 1-5" in *Luther's Works*, vol.1, J. Pelikan (ed.), Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 1958.

### Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is to create? Who is a creator?
- 2) What are the main topics of the two creation stories in Genesis? What have been the most frequent misinterpretations?
- 3) Who owns creation? The owners of our lands and our work
- 4) Is creation always good? The causes of evil
- 5) Can creation happen without a cause from the past?
- 6) Creation and freedom: the new creation, creating the future
- 7) Human interconnectedness and the art of paradoxical thinking