

From Chaos to Cosmos: Theological Insights on Creation Narratives in Patristic Literature

Moses Adeleke Adeoye

ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja, Nigeria

* Corresponding author: princeadelekm@gmail.com

Article History:

Received: September 29, 2024

Accepted: October 30, 2024

Published: November 7, 2024

How to cite this article:

Adeoye, M.A. (2024). From Chaos to Cosmos: Theological Insights on Creation Narratives in Patristic Literature.

International Journal of Religious and Interdisciplinary Studies (IJoRIS), 1(2), 175–186.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14029008>

Copyright © 2024 by IJoRIS:
International Journal of
Religious and Interdisciplinary
Studies.

This publication
is licensed under a CC BY-SA.

Abstract: This study investigates the development of creation narratives within Patristic literature, focusing on key theologians from the Apostolic to Medieval periods, such as Augustine, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. The primary issue explored is the theological theme of chaos and cosmos, which illustrates how God transforms chaos into order through His creative and redemptive actions. The research traces how early Christian thinkers understood and articulated this theme, particularly about God's kingship and the overarching narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of prominent Patristic writings, systematically reviewing key texts that discuss creation narratives. This method allows for a detailed examination of the theological nuances present in these works, highlighting significant trends and variations in thought among different theologians. The iterative approach of this analysis uncovers the dynamic nature of early Christian cosmology and its implications for Trinitarian theology. The findings reveal that Patristic thinkers were deeply concerned with establishing a solid theological foundation for understanding creation about the Trinity. Their reflections continue to enrich contemporary Christian thought on creation, offering insights relevant to modern spiritual and theological discussions. This study recommends further engagement with Patristic literature to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, historical contextualisation, and meaningful theological reflection on creation in the context of contemporary issues.

Keywords: *Patristic; Chaos; Cosmos; Early Church Fathers*

1. Introduction

The theme of chaos and the universe is a subset of the creation, fall, redemption, and new creation tale. It is related to the theme of God's kingship and the arrival of God's kingdom. A frequent name for several biblical terms, including "void," "without shape," and so on, is "chaos." "Cosmos" denotes the harmonious, well-ordered universe. Genesis 1:1 describes the creation of this orderly universe, and Revelation 21:1 describes the creation of a new one, with intervening prefiguring units of disorder being restored to order. Theologians' usage of the term "chaos" in articulating a theology of creation has recently increased due to engagement with the sciences and Old Testament studies (Polkinghorne, 2014 pp. 88-82). The word has not been widely used across other disciplines but mostly among biblical scholars conducting comparative studies of the ancient Near East. Some ideas that need consideration for their theological implications have found a home under this widely used vocabulary. The more narrowly focused assessment focuses on whether the phrase is appropriate for use in a given context, be it the *tohu wabohu* and *tehom* of Genesis 1:2 in biblical studies or unpredictability in science. Using "chaos" as a label indicates how the data are understood, influencing how people think and talk about the data moving forward. In addition to reflecting the world (the facts), it constructs the world/worldview that academics operate inside. In this context, the ramifications of the concepts developed under "chaos" are assessed; however, the primary focus is on how the term was initially applied to the data.



Patristic refers to the early Christian Church Fathers who defended the Gospel, wrote sermons, and commented on the Bible (Kannengiesser, 2004). They recorded events in Church history and combined their age's thoughts with their Christian faith. From the New Testament's end to AD 100, the Patristic era is challenging to comprehend in the early 21st century due to irrelevant debates, classical philosophy's use, and doctrinal diversity (Shantz & Ruparell, 2012). The Church Fathers' interpretations of patristics, reinterpreted in light of modern biblical writings, reflect the controversial ideas of a distant past. The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers lived and wrote after the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, while the Ante-Nicene Fathers lived and wrote before the Council (Humfress, 2015). Some of the most influential Fathers include Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Theodoret, Jerome, Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose. The Latin father Augustine of Hippo and the Greek father John Chrysostom are considered the most outstanding or influential.

Creatio ex nihilo, a biblical metaphysical theology, emerged in the second century CE as a response to the Gnostics' belief in a distinction between the Old and New Testament Gods (Norman, 1977, pp. 291-318). The Gnostics viewed the Old Testament God as a lesser deity and believed the world was evil because its matter couldn't come into contact with God. The doctrine of creation ex nihilo emerged from a conflict with the Gnostics, who argued that if God didn't create matter, neither could he make the elements (Tsumura, 2012). The Church fathers suggested the Gnostics were at fault by pointing out that the matter was good since God ushered it forth himself to create the earth (Burkitt, 2007; 56-59). The Catechism argues that God created from nothing to show his power through his creation and that the world depends on God for its existence. There was no pre-existing matter God could rely on to create the universe, and everything was required to come from nothing by His will.

Philo believed that God used logos to shape formless matter into intelligible beings, using assistants as a Creator (Blowers, 2012; 57-59). He reconciled Jewish theology with Plato's philosophy by suggesting that God's eternal thoughts were created as real beings before he created the world. Philo believed that God continuously ordered matter through his thoughts, and the pattern of creation in Genesis echoed the metaphysical support of Scripture. The Demiurge created the world by assembling elements from existing chaos, including fire, water, earth, and air (Almqvist, 2018). These formed the "body" of the cosmos, endowed with a "soul" or its eternal movement. God alone is a being, and every being has its origin from God. God is distinct from the world and created it freely. Demiurge stated that creation is an everlasting relationship between God and his creation, with God not separated from it and a connection between all its elements. Everything in creation is interrelated to God, who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:23).

Chaos, originating from matter, was created by God through divine intervention. Its form, life, and properties were not possible without divine intervention. The universe, which may not have always been eternal, was created by God. Natural theology helps us understand the universe and God's ability to create the heavens, despite the unknown date of creation (Foster, 1934, 456). Therefore, chaos exists as a result of divine intervention. Theologians increasingly use "chaos" in biblical and theological studies due to Bible study and Western intellectual shifts, particularly in sciences, leading to new cosmologies. Some theologians incorporate "chaos" concepts into their theology to explain the Christian faith within the intellectual and cultural environment, providing an account of the faith in the current milieu.

Biblical studies have been influenced by the concept of "chaos" in the past 150 years, largely due to archaeological discoveries and comparative studies (Gunkel & Heinrich, 2006; 22). These discoveries have helped reconstruct ancient worldviews, particularly the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite religious writings. This led to comparing these writings with the Israelites' familiar writings, particularly their cosmogonies. In the 19th century, there was a desire to replace traditional portrayals of the Old Testament and its theological views, leading to the adoption of comparative studies. George Smith, while working on cuneiform tablets, Epic of Gilgamesh and Enuma Elisha have been identified as the oldest sources of a "chaos myth" (Hollis, 2020; 280)." The ancient text of the Neighbour is suggested as the origin story of Israel, which already contains chaos. Herman Gunkel linked Tiamat's corpse's creation to a divine battle with chaos, a concept reiterated in biblical studies, ancient Near East, and texts.

Chaotic systems are unpredictable systems that lack clear order and a high level of entropy. One needs to know the exact details of the initial conditions to predict their future location, which is difficult due to the Heisenberg Principle. This indeterminacy results in longer-term unpredictability, as we cannot calculate the exact values of the initial conditions, which are external factors. The indeterminacy of these systems leads to longer-term unpredictability. Chaotic systems in science and biblical studies emerge from chaos, but their usage in ANE and modern science can blur the distinctions between their worldviews.

The issue at hand involves the intersection of multiple discourses, with divided opinions on God's creative activity and relationship to creation in a changed context. Conventional theological formulations are uncomfortable for some, as they support ideas that have been rejected throughout the tradition regarding God, the world, and creation. Critics of biblical studies are increasingly focusing on the use of "chaos" in Old Testament images, Israel's reliance on neighboring writings, and the existence of a narrative in the Bible, *Enuma Elisha*, where creation-as-ordering emerges from *Chaoskampf*. Skeptics argue that the terms "chaos," Israel's "chaos myth," and a storyline of "chaos-conflict-creation" (*Chaoskampf*) have become popular in religious spheres, despite never being confirmed beyond a reasonable doubt. The burden of proof lies with skeptics, as proponents have never demonstrated their case, and the validity of their framework is assumed. A thorough data analysis is required before establishing theology on this wave.

The study of chaos and the cosmos in Patristic literature revealed several gaps and challenges that scholars face. These include limited interdisciplinary approaches, variability in interpretations, historical contextualization, application to contemporary issues, and theological implications of sin. The current research often focuses on theology with insufficient engagement from other disciplines like philosophy and natural sciences. This lack of interdisciplinary dialogue can hinder a comprehensive understanding of how chaos and cosmos interact in ancient and modern contexts. Variable interpretations by Patristic thinkers like Augustine and Origen can create confusion and complicate efforts to establish a unified theological framework. Historical contextualisation is needed to understand how these concepts evolved and their relationship to contemporary cosmologies. Application to contemporary issues is challenging, as scholars must navigate the complexities of translating ancient texts into actionable insights for today's ecological and social challenges. Theological implications of sin on the relationship between chaos and the cosmos are also critical areas that require further exploration. Addressing these gaps and challenges can strengthen the argument for the relevance of chaos and cosmos themes in historical and modern contexts, fostering a richer dialogue within theological studies.

2. Literatur Review

2.1. Understanding Chaos in Patristic Literature

The Patristic period, characterized by the teachings of the early Christian Fathers, is crucial for the formation of Christian teaching. However, the Patristic Understanding of Creation, which summarizes these teachings, faces challenges in debates between science and religion. Works authored by Christians before the eighth century are referred to as patristic literature, except for the New Testament. It is generally considered the entire Christian literature of the early Christian centuries, regardless of orthodoxy. The Fathers of the Christian church, respected bishops, and exemplary life teachers were considered the Fathers. The orthodoxy of Christian writers like Origen and the existence of early Christian literature have led to the abandonment of a constrictive definition. Understanding Orthodox fathers in isolation from their unconventional peers is impossible. Early Christian literature, which merits comprehensive study, is essential as it would be harmful to exclude any area due to doctrinal flaws.

The Patristic Understanding of Creation, a fundamental text in Christian theology, reflects the teachings of the Church Fathers on creation. Despite challenges in modern discussions, it remains a cornerstone of Christian theology. Process theology and other attempts to reconceptualize creation have challenged key elements, such as creation *ex nihilo*, God's transcendence, the world's absolute creatureliness, goodness, and divine action. Von Rad (1972)

highlights the conflict in the Genesis story between humans and non-human beings, arguing that the story contains ideas beyond human comprehension and that chaos precedes creation. He emphasizes the need to consider chaos in analyzing creation, as some stories depict humans as superior while others are anthropocentric, illustrating the conflict between humans and non-human animals. Brueggemann (1982) argues that understanding the tension in the context and tradition of a matter is crucial, emphasizing that creation has the freedom to react and the creator has a purpose and will for creation. Arnold (2009) asserts that creation is a bridge between eternity and history, and chaos preceded it, not originating from God. Van Selms (1967) explores the connection between two creation narratives, acknowledging the sovereign act of one God. Brueggemann (2010) defines creation as establishing order that facilitates life within a chaotic mass.

Origen's Commentary on Genesis suggests that chaos is a state that precedes God's creative act, transforming it into order through God's will. Augustine argues that God created the world from nothing, imposing order on the chaotic state of pre-creation. Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes that humanity was created to bring order to the world's chaos, reinforcing the theological significance of human agency in the cosmos. Irenaeus argues that introducing sin brought disorder into the world, which can be seen as a form of chaos. However, he also emphasizes that God's redemptive plan through Christ aims to restore order and harmony to creation. This duality of chaos and order in Irenaeus' thought illustrates the ongoing struggle between divine purpose and human failure, enriching the understanding of chaos in Patristic literature. By examining these texts, we can appreciate the depth and complexity of their understanding of the relationship between chaos and the divine act of creation, which remains relevant in contemporary discussions of theology and cosmology.

2.2. The Concept of Creation in Patristic Writings

The Patristic Understanding of Creation is a comprehensive anthology that reflects the teachings of the Church Fathers, a fundamental part of Christian theology since Roman and Byzantine times. This anthology aims to restore a theologically sound understanding of creation, which has been attacked by process theology and other attempts to rethink creation by addressing a pressing and practical need. Key tenets of Christian belief are addressed. The concept of creation in Patristic writings reflects the early Christian understanding of how the world came into being according to their theological perspectives. During the Patristic era, roughly from the 1st to the 8th centuries AD, theologians known as the Church Fathers engaged in deep philosophical and theological discussions about the nature of God and His relationship to the created world. In their writings, the concept of creation is intricately linked to the nature of God as the ultimate Creator. The Church Fathers emphasized that God created the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*) through His divine will and power. This divine act of creation was seen as an expression of God's love and wisdom, as He brought into existence a universe filled with order, beauty, and purpose. Moreover, Patristic writings explore the significance of creation and humanity's role and purpose within the cosmos. They often emphasize humanity's unique status as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, endowed with rationality, moral agency, and the capacity for communion with God. Additionally, Patristic theologians grappled with the theological implications of the Fall and its impact on creation. They discussed the consequences of human sinfulness, such as suffering, death, and the corruption of the natural order, while also affirming the hope of redemption and restoration through Christ. Furthermore, the concept of creation in Patristic writings is not solely concerned with the origin of the physical world but extends to the spiritual dimension. The Church Fathers explored the idea of ongoing creation and providence, wherein God sustains and guides the universe towards its ultimate fulfillment by His divine plan.

The patristic teaching on Creation differs from liberal religious efforts to reconcile secular and theistic evolution. Father Seraphim argues that Protestant-inspired approaches to "creationism" and "intelligent design" sometimes rationalize the mechanics of the biblical Six Days of Creation and human life before the fall, which the Church Fathers considered mysteries. Before the fall, humans were created gracefully, participating in Divine Energies but not Essence. They were conditionally immortal, with Adam and Eve experiencing an irrational desire for pleasures in God. St. Maximus the Confessor believed that direct relation with the essences of created beings was possible without

imagination and that humans did not experience irrational desire for pleasures. Siewers' (2020) study suggests that the original Cosmos did not involve carnivorous, perishable fruits or creatures. Animals were given plants to eat before the fall, and decay and death were absent. Abbot Damascene suggests the fossil record should be dated after man's fall. Russell's (2015; 154) work highlights the fall of Adam and Eve, which resulted in the mind's objectification, spiritual death, and sin inclination, leading to a stripping of grace and physical death. This separation of the soul from the body also led to sexual passion and procreation, as the Fathers wrote.

The Fathers suggest eschatological connections between man's pre-fallen state, the state of man, and the cosmos after Christ's Second Coming and resurrection. Restoration to Paradise and further deification will occur, except those who cut themselves off from grace due to wicked, selfish lives. The mystery of freedom for men involves Jesus Christ's redemption, as seen in the salvation of the Wise Thief and Adam and Eve from Hades. The Genesis account, symbolic and literal, is intertwined in patristic commentaries, reflecting spiritual presence in physical reality. This is also evident in liturgical mysteries of the Church and the ascetic struggle towards theosis in hesychasm. The Byzantine calendar, used until Peter the Great, dates this reflection as 7528 from the Creation of the world, based on Scripture in the Church Tradition. The Church views Genesis as a revelation from God to Moses, with Jesus Christ referencing Adam, Eve, and their son Abel as actual persons. The Church teaches that Jesus Christ, as the Son and Word, had a special role in Creation, depicted in Orthodox iconography as the Second Adam and the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, as the Second Eve. These historical accounts are interconnected with the Church's teachings on Jesus Christ and His Church's development throughout Scripture.

The concept of creation in Patristic writings offers a rich theological framework that can be compared with modern thinkers to enhance our understanding of creation. The Church Fathers emphasized the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, asserting that God created the world from nothing through His divine will and power. This foundational belief underscores God's transcendence and the absolute creatureliness of the world. Modern thinkers' process theologians challenge this notion, suggesting that creation is an ongoing process rather than a singular act (Blowers, 2012; Sölle, 2016). They argue that God and the world are interdependent, which contrasts sharply with the Patristic view of God's sovereignty over creation. Patristic literature presents God as the ultimate Creator whose act of creation reflects His love and wisdom, resulting in a universe filled with order and purpose. Modern thinkers in the field of theistic evolution often attempt to reconcile scientific understandings of the universe's origins with a belief in God (Ferngren, 2022; Harrison, 2000). They may view creation as a process guided by divine providence, leading to a more immanent understanding of God than the more transcendent view held by the Church Fathers. Humanity's role in creation is also explored in Patristic writings, emphasizing humanity's responsibility to participate in God's creative order. Contemporary thinkers, such as Jürgen Moltmann, address the problem of evil and suffering within a framework that emphasizes God's solidarity with creation in its suffering, reflecting a contemporary understanding of divine providence that resonates with Patristic thought. This comparative analysis enriches the discussion of creation theology and its relevance today.

3. Methods

This study explores the evolution of creation narratives in Patristic literature, focusing on the texts of early Christian theologians such as Augustine, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. The primary analysis unit is the texts, which discuss creation narratives. The selection process involves systematically reviewing prominent Patristic writings, including works by figures like Augustine, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. The research design adopted for this study is qualitative textual analysis, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuances and themes present in Patristic literature. This methodological approach ensures a robust foundation for analyzing the evolution of creation narratives. The iterative approach allows for significant trends and variations in thought, capturing the dynamic nature of early Christian cosmology. The criteria for text selection include theological significance, historical impact, diversity of perspectives, qualitative textual analysis, iterative approach, thematic coding, and incorporation of secondary sources. Theological significance was prioritized, with works by key figures like Augustine, Origen, and

Gregory of Nyssa due to their influential roles in shaping early Christian thought. The selection process considered the historical impact of the texts on Christian doctrine and cosmology, including texts widely cited or referenced in subsequent theological discussions. Thematic coding was used to identify and categorize themes related to chaos and cosmos, organize the data, and draw connections between different texts and their interpretations. Secondary sources, including scholarly commentaries and historical analyses, were also incorporated to provide context and support for the primary texts. The data collection technique employed is systematic textual analysis, which allows for extracting specific themes and motifs related to creation from the selected texts. This technique is chosen for its capacity to reveal underlying structures and meanings embedded in the narratives.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Evolution Order and Cosmos in Patristic Texts

Patristic cosmology distinguishes between the uncreated (God alone) and the created (God's creation), which consists of spiritual and material spheres, including angels. This distinction implies that humans cannot naturally know God, the uncreated. In the patristic understanding, God is the only source of the entire created order, reflecting aspects of the Godhead. Christian theology posits that God created the universe from nothing, ordering chaos to give way to order. The Wisdom of Solomon and Second Maccabees mirror the Platonic idea of God creating the world from formless matter. Hebrew Scriptures assert that nothing existed before or outside God, suggesting nothingness before creation. The New Testament, except for stating Christ as the Logos, is largely silent on cosmology, except for the statement that Christ is the Logos whom God creates and maintains the universe. Paul posits that God creates non-existent things, stating that the world's cause is external and only through His will, and that creation is an ontological transition from non-being to existence.

St. Augustine argues that the sacred and infallible Scriptures reveal that God created the world from nothing in the first instant of time (Ortlund, 2020). He believes that the words at the beginning of Genesis indicate that God had made nothing before and that the world was created simultaneously with time (Augustine, 1982). Augustine views time as the measure of change in created things, with no angels, material things, or matter before creation. He acknowledges that angels were created before time, as the words in the beginning mean divine Wisdom. Augustine discusses the meaning of heaven and earth in Genesis, either as spiritual or material parts (Knuuttila, 2001; 103-115).

The disruption of the order of creation leads to ecological issues. The biblical, patristic, medieval, and reformation theologies were established under conditions different from the modern evolutionary view of reality. A modern theology of God must align with the "good news of God" from an evolutionary perspective and explore the proper discussion of the Christian God in an evolutionary environment. The question is addressed through a 'theology of nature' and a modern scientific reformulation, focusing on creation, the order of creation, and an underlying wisdom that forms the basis of all. Gottwald (1985) highlights wisdom literature as focusing on adjusting life to the world's basic order and dealing with it when it doesn't work. Wisdom is closely linked to God's ability to create, shape, and organize creation, maintain the universe, and direct human history and lives. Both creation stories acknowledge one God's sovereign act of creation.

In his work "Confessions," Augustine asserts that God is the sole source of all creation, stating that everything exists as a reflection of His goodness and wisdom (Lamb, 2007). In "On First Principles," Origen discusses the concept of creation ex nihilo (creation from nothing), foundational to Patristic cosmology. This perspective emphasizes the transformative power of God's will in shaping the cosmos. The Wisdom of Solomon reflects the Platonist idea that God creates the world from formless matter, highlighting the transformative nature of divine creation. Gregory of Nyssa discusses the fall of humanity and its implications for the created order, highlighting the need for redemption and restoration through Christ. The Patristic texts collectively emphasize that creation is an ongoing process reflecting God's continuous engagement with the world. Church Fathers articulate that God's creative act manifests His wisdom and purpose, inviting humanity to participate in the divine order. These examples provide a robust

foundation for understanding the evolution of creation narratives and the theological implications of chaos and cosmos in early Christian thought.

4.2. The Symbolism of Light and Darkness in Creation Narratives

Light and darkness are natural phenomena and symbolic meanings often associated with primordial chaos and world order. Ancient Middle Eastern conceptions view light and darkness as rhythmical alternations, with darkness as the mysterious ground and source of light. Light is associated with creation and symbolizes warmth, sensuality, and intellectual enlightenment. However, darkness is seen as an outcome of failure within the creational process. If light and darkness are interpreted as complementary stages, they are seen as a harmonious totality. From around the sixth century BC, there was a significant shift in the understanding of light and darkness and other similar polarities due to the emergence of transcendental, logical thought. Cosmologies often begin with the emergence of light from a primeval darkness, while mythologies describe the world's end as a twilight or darkness of the gods. The sun is often connected to light as the source, but not all gods of light are solar deities. Initially, there was no ethical valuation of the opposition between light and darkness. Light symbolizes life, happiness, prosperity, and perfect being, while darkness symbolizes chaos, death, and the underworld. Light's continual existence is ensured by its regular renewal, while darkness is associated with chaos and death. Both cosmic and individual levels are affected by the interconnectedness of these symbols.

The pre-creative state of Genesis 1:2 was described as "the deep" (têhowm) covered with darkness (choshek). This dark covering established the initial unformed state before God's Spirit moved. The light was separated from the darkness, forming the cosmos into "day" and "night," establishing an orderly time-keeping system. Like the first creation, light is central to the last creation, with its source being "the glory of God" envisioned in Christ as "its lamp." John envisions the consummation of the new creation as the attainment of the eternal Sabbath, where God's redemptive plan is complete, and He and His creation can now spend eternity at rest without needing further redemptive work. Darkness (choshek) is employed in Exodus 10:21, where Yahweh explicitly instructs Moses to "stretch out your hand toward the sky so that choshek spreads over Egypt". This separation of darkness from light in Exodus 10:23b states that Yahweh is creating a new people for Himself, the Israelites.

Isaiah seems to point to the elimination of spiritual blindness (darkness) and the appearance of spiritual understanding (light) with the coming of the Servant of the Lord. He suggests that the coming of the Messiah will bring a new creation, which also restores God's presence among His people. Restoration to God is viewed as a new life that follows the darkness (spiritual death) of separation from God. John's vision of God and Christ as the light of the new Jerusalem flagging redemption's completion with the restoration of God's eternal dwelling with men as light and life. The great light of Christ seems to contrast with apocalyptic prophecies of the Day of the Lord that speak of darkness (choshek) to warn that the earth and heavens will return to the primeval state of darkness before the Lord creates light. The prophetic contrasts between the prophesied Messianic light and prophesied darkness of the Day of the Lord seem intended to reveal that a final new creation would come in Christ that would also bring the destruction of the first creation, which was irreparable due to the destructive consequences of sin. These contrasts between light and darkness are prevalent throughout the New Testament, as Christ warned His followers not to let the light within them become darkness. They were to be lights to the Gentiles, working to save them from eternal judgment described as darkness. We who were once in darkness are now in the light, transformed by God's creative power in us, and we are not to unequally yoke ourselves with unbelievers, for light has no communion with darkness.

4.3. The Eschatological Dimension of Creation in Patristic Texts

Eschatology is a discourse about the last things, focusing on the ultimate human purpose on individual and cosmic levels. It explores life after death and the final stage of the world. Individual eschatology questions personal survival after death while universal eschatology explores the future state of humanity and its relevance to the Last

Days. Eschatology, a belief system in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim societies, emphasizes the end of history, the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, the messianic era, and theodicy. These themes are prevalent during crises and offer hope for a better world or revolutionary societal transformation. Eschatological expectations can be individual or collective, depending on the believer's involvement in the world. Individual forms often promote apolitical or conservative attitudes, while collective forms involve political activism and God's justice. In non-biblical religions, there is no "end" but a cyclic pattern of cosmic destruction and rebirth. Mythical eschatology views history as a cultic drama, with priests and kings performing preordained rituals.

History celebrates the cosmos's eternity and the world's origin, with biblical eschatologies focusing on the historical future. Rituals like Passover and seder serve as reminders of events. The early church focused on four eschatological concerns: Christ's return, resurrection, judgment, and the catastrophic ending of the world order. The Apostolic Fathers believed in the imminent second coming of Christ.

4.4. The Continuity and Discontinuity Between Chaos and Cosmos in Patristic Views

Patristic views emphasize the distinction between chaos and cosmos in cosmology, reflecting broader theological understandings of creation and the divine. The cosmos represents the ordered and structured universe created by God out of chaos, reflecting the divine intention and purpose. In contrast, chaos signifies the formless and void state that preceded creation, symbolizing disorder, and potentiality. The Patristic perspective recognizes that humans exist within the cosmos framework and are inherently limited in understanding the uncreated divine. While humans can apprehend aspects of God's revelation through creation, reason, and faith, they cannot fully comprehend the divine essence or the mysteries of God's eternal nature. This distinction shapes the perception of the universe in Patristic thought, emphasizing the transcendence of God and the immanence of God's presence within creation. All things, including the cosmos, reflect some aspect of the divine, serving as pointers to the ultimate reality of God's existence and sovereignty. The distinction between chaos and cosmos highlights the dynamic interplay between order and disorder, creation and redemption, in the divine plan. Through God's creative act, chaos is transformed into a cosmos, bringing forth beauty, harmony, and purpose out of primordial chaos.

The Patristic views on the discontinuity between chaos and the cosmos are a nuanced understanding of the theological implications of the Fall and the introduction of sin and brokenness into the world. Early Christian theologians grappled with the consequences of the Fall and its impact on the harmony and order of creation. The concept of the Fall, rooted in Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, represents a pivotal moment in Patristic thought. The disobedience of humanity led to a rupture in the relationship between God, humanity, and the created order. The introduction of sin disrupted the harmonious relationship between humanity and God, resulting in a separation from divine grace and alienation from the intended state of communion and fellowship. Consequently, chaos and disorder entered the world, disrupting the harmony and coherence of creation. The Patristic thinkers recognized that sin affected humans and had profound implications for the natural world. The disruption caused by sin introduced disharmony, suffering, and brokenness into the fabric of the cosmos, tarnishing the perfect order and beauty of God's creation. Through the lens of the Fall and the subsequent introduction of sin into the world, the Patristic views on the discontinuity between chaos and the cosmos highlight the need for redemption and reconciliation. The disruption caused by sin underscores the brokenness inherent in the human condition and the created order, pointing towards the transformative power of God's grace in restoring and renewing all things. In this theological framework, the narrative of the Fall serves as a backdrop against which the themes of salvation, renewal, and the ultimate restoration of the cosmos unfold in the Christian tradition.

The Patristic theologians emphasized the profound consequences of the fall of humanity, as described in the Book of Genesis, highlighting the disruption of the harmonious relationship between humanity and God and the distortion of the created order. They viewed the fall as a turning away from God and disobedience to His will, resulting in humanity's vulnerability to sin and death. In response to this theological challenge, the Patristic tradition underscored the need for redemption through the work of Christ. They emphasized the significance of the

Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as central to God's plan of salvation and restoration. The Fathers of the Church articulated how Christ's sacrificial death on the cross was a redemptive act that atoned for the sins of humanity and restored the broken relationship between God and humanity. Lastly, the Patristic theologians celebrated the divine harmony infused into the cosmos by God's creative act, seeing the universe as a harmonious whole where diverse elements and creatures coexist in mutual interdependence and cooperation.

5. Conclusion

The study "From Chaos to Cosmos: The Evolution of Creation in Patristic Literature" examines early Christian thinkers' interpretation of the Genesis narrative, focusing on God's transformative power. It highlights the transformative power of God's creative act and the profound theological themes embedded in their understanding of the cosmos. The research highlights the depth and richness of Patristic literature in articulating the theological significance of creation as a reflection of God's wisdom, goodness, purpose, and harmony. It emphasizes the importance of engaging with the insights of early Christian Church Fathers to deepen our understanding of creation theology and its implications for contemporary Christian thought. By drawing upon the theological heritage of the early Church Fathers, contemporary Christian theologians can gain valuable perspectives on environmental stewardship, social justice, and the interconnectedness of all creation. This cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to creation theology can contribute to a more holistic understanding of humanity's role as stewards of the Earth and our interconnectedness with the created world.

The study of creation in Patristic literature presents numerous opportunities for further exploration. Comparative analysis with other religious texts, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, could provide insights into universal themes of chaos and order, helping to understand how different cultures conceptualize the relationship between the divine and creation. Including perspectives from environmental science and ethics could enrich the discussion on creation and stewardship, revealing the relevance of early Christian thought in today's ecological crises. Focusing on lesser-known Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus or Tertullian, could reveal diverse perspectives on creation, offering unique insights into the evolution of creation theology. Historical contextualization could reveal how external influences shaped theological discussions on creation and chaos. Investigating the representation of women in creation narratives could provide a fresh perspective on gender roles in early Christian thought, examining texts discussing figures like Eve and their implications for understanding creation and humanity's relationship with God. Exploring how the themes of chaos and cosmos in Patristic literature can inform contemporary Christian theology and practice could be valuable, guiding modern believers in understanding their role in creation and their relationship with the divine. These suggestions aim to deepen the exploration of creation narratives in Patristic literature, highlighting their relevance and potential impact on various fields of study.

References

- Almqvist, O. H. (2018). *The Cosmos in the Making: Humans, Gods and Animals in Early Greek Theogonies* (Doctoral dissertation, Trinity College Dublin).
- Arnold Bill, T. (2009). *Genesis*. New Cambridge Bible commentary. Cambridge University Press
- Blowers, P. M. (2012). *Drama of the divine economy: Creator and creation in early Christian theology and piety*. OUP Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199660414.001.0001>
- Brueggemann, W. (1982). *Genesis*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Brueggemann, W. (2010). *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*. Abingdon Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237777.003.0038>

- Burkitt, F. C. (1932). *Church & gnosis: a study of Christian thought and speculation in the second century*. CUP Archive.
- Epsen, E. (2020). The Cosmic Liturgy. In *From Laws to Liturgy* (pp. 195-228). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413979_010
- Epsen, E. (2020). *From laws to liturgy: an idealist theology of creation* (Vol. 21). Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004413979>
- Ferngren, G. B. (2022). Science and religion. In *The Routledge History of American Science* (pp. 200-214). Routledge.
- Foster, M. B. (1934). The Christian doctrine of creation and the rise of modern natural science. *Mind*, 43(172), 446-468. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/XLIII.172.446>
- Gottwald, N. K. (1985). *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*. Fortress Press
- Greidanus, S. (2018). *From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to New Creation*. Crossway.
- Gunkel, H. (2006). *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Eerdmans.
- Harrison, E. (2000). *Cosmology: the science of the universe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Haykin, M. A. (2011). *Rediscovering the church fathers: Who they were and how they shaped the church*. Crossway.
- Humfress, C. (2015). Patristic sources. *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Law*, 97-118. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139034401.010>
- Inch, M. A. (1998). *Chaos paradigm: a theological exploration*. University Press of America.
- Kannengiesser, C. (2004). Patristic Exegesis of the Books of the Bible. In *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis* (pp. 271-373). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004531529_010
- Knuuttila, S. (2001). Time and creation in Augustine. *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521650186.009>
- Lamb, M. L. (2007). Eternity creates and redeems time: a key to augustine's confessions within a theology of history. In *Divine creation in ancient, medieval, and early modern thought* (pp. 117-140). Brill.
- Norman, K. (1977). *Ex nihilo: The development of the doctrines of God and creation in early Christianity*. Brigham Young University Studies, 17(3), 291-318.
- Ortlund, G. (2020). *Retrieving Augustine's doctrine of creation: ancient wisdom for current controversy*. InterVarsity Press. <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF9-21Ortlund>
- Polkinghorne, J. (2014). *Theology in the Context of Science*. Yale University Press.
- Rose, S. (2000). *Genesis, creation, and early man: The Orthodox Christian vision*. Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.
- Russell, N. (2015). The Work of Christ in Patristic Theology. *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, 154.
- Shantz, D. H., & Ruparell, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Christian Thought in the Twenty-first Century: Agenda for the Future*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Siewers, A.K. (2020). Paul. Grounded in The Beginning: Father Seraphim Rose and The Patristic View of Creation. <https://ecosemiotics.com/2020/07/15/grounded-in-the-beginning-blessed-seraphim-rose-and-the-patristic-view-of-creation/>
- Sölle, D. (2016). *Thinking about God: An introduction to theology*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Theokritoff, E. (2008). *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521864848>

Tsumura, T. D. (2012). The Doctrine of Creation ex nihilo and the Translation of tōhū wābōhū. In *Pentateuchal Traditions in the Late Second Temple Period* (pp. 1-21). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004223608_002

Van Selms, A. (1967). *Genesis: deel 1*. Callenbach.

Von Rad, G. (1972). *Genesis*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM.

