

Agents of Creative Change
An Exploration of the Created Co-Creator Model

by

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*She's gonna dream up the world she wants to live in
She's gonna dream out loud, dream out loud—U2*

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Introduction

This paper is part of a long series of attempts to process the events of my life over the past few years. It is a paper built upon the big questions—who am I? and What am I to do to effect change in this world? One experience stands out in my mind as the spark that set these thoughts ablaze and remains at the center of all my subsequent experiences—my semester in India.

I spent roughly two-and-a-half months in India on a Gustavus-sponsored study abroad trip with fifteen other college students and one professor. The main thrust of our studies centered on social justice issues—the caste system, poverty, environmental concerns, women's issues, etc. During the first two weeks of class we studied nothing but the atrocities that are perpetrated against these marginalized groups. It was extremely emotional and very overwhelming. A feeling of helplessness began to arise in me and in our group as a whole—a feeling that would stay with us for quite some time. It was a feeling centered on the question: "But what can I do about it?"

We spent some time doing field studies with different non-government organizations (NGOs) that were working to better the lives of the less fortunate. But there were so many issues and so many injustices that it was hard to know how to begin addressing them. My time in India did not affect just my outlook on social justice issues; it also had a profound impact on my theological outlook on life (especially my time working with Dalit or Untouchable women). While I was in India I wrote, "It has become obvious to me that there is no need for an abstract theology done within the confines of academia. Christian theology must accurately reflect and be involved with the

concrete needs of the humanity Christ gave his Kingdom to." As I now sit here, back within these friendly confines, I am reminded of the obligation my subsequent ponderings will have—obligations to adequately reflect "the way things really are" (as Philip Hefner calls it), and to not get lost within the abstract realm, but to use these abstract thoughts to pull together a more comprehensible and informed view of our humanity.¹

I have come to believe a few things about the way things really are in the last few years. I believe that in reality those whom Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes are indeed blessed—the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, the seekers. The values of these groups of people are not an "inversion" of reality's values, as Nietzsche suggests.² Instead these meek and vulnerable values are the values of reality. Jesus' statement says that humans will not find fruitfulness and blessedness by exercising their will to power and dominance, but in service. This blessedness does not mean that the servant life is easy. In fact, all of these paths (poverty, meekness, peace etc.) seem hard. But through some strange mystery of reality, blessedness lies within them.

I have come to believe that those who are able to speak must raise their voices for those who cannot. As Estella Norwood Evans says, Christianity must realize "that it cannot preach the gospel of Christ without efforts to assist and advocate for those to whom the gospel is addressed."³ Along with raising a voice, I believe that the best way to advocate is to focus on empowering the whole person so that he/she may find his/her

¹ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 33.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 60.

³ Estella Norwood Evans, "Liberation Theology, Empowerment Theory and Social Work Practice with the Oppressed," *International Social Work* 35 (1992), 138.

own voice. The notion of empowerment does not imply helping those in need by distributing welfare from a distance. Empowerment means working with individuals to give them skills and knowledge so that they can have power for themselves. A great effort is made to "create a genuine partnership in the empowering process."⁴ Thus, the empowerment process is about relationships. It is about engaging in a partnership with an "other" to enable the "other" to participate in the fullness of life.

While in India, I studied about this empowerment approach to social change and witnessed the effect it had in the lives of a number of people. I was moved by the testimony of women who had found a way to express themselves and stand up to oppression because of the work of a few individuals. Because of the influence this empowerment process has had on my way of thinking, I have been intrigued by the idea of humans living in a "genuine partnership" and its implications for working toward peace and justice.

I first came across the term "co-creator" in my "Holocaust and Theology" class. The theologian Clark M. Williamson stated in passing that humanity needs to assume its responsibility "as co-creators of a humane and just future."⁵ I was touched by the poetry of the phrase—the way it spoke to so much of my experience and gave me a way of thinking about my role in shaping the future. I had been agonizing about the six million who died in Nazi Germany, about those I met in India who still suffer day to day, about our world engaged in a war with no foreseeable end, about the incredible maldistribution of wealth in my country, and about the question, "But what can I do about it?" Here were words that spoke to my heart. I could be a co-creator with God. I could use my God-

⁴ Ibid, 142.

⁵ Clark M. Williamson, *Has God Rejected His People?* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1982), 172.

given creative power to work for God's call in Amos 5:24 to "let justice roll down like waters, / and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."⁶

The idea of humans as God's co-creators is not new. It clearly has its roots in the Hebrew creation story found in Genesis 1-11, in which human beings play a crucial role in shaping the created order and God's relationship to it.⁷ Within Christianity, the co-creator concept has been very popular in the Eastern Orthodox Church with its emphasis on the transfiguration of humans into divine beings.⁸ Within the secular West, there has also been an emphasis since the Renaissance on the positive influences of human creativity.⁹ But it has recently found new relevance within the Western theological tradition both in post-Holocaust theology (especially for Jewish-Christian dialogue and for assuming past responsibility while being held responsible for creating a world in which it never happens again) and in the religion and science discussion (especially for the theological implications of our current ecological crisis).¹⁰ It is also a central component within one of the most influential theological movements of the 20th century, process theology: "the basis of [which] is the co-creativity of God and his [sic] world."¹¹

The source that I first came across and was most interested by within this discussion of human co-creatorship was Philip Hefner's The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion. In this book, Hefner proposes that humans can be best understood

⁶ All Biblical quotes taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, "Creator, Creature, and Co-Creation in Genesis 1-2," *All Things New: Essays in Honor of Roy A. Harrisville* (St. Paul, Minn.: Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 1992), and Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1994).

⁸ Stanley Samuel Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theocia of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life Publishing Co., 1983).

⁹ Marvin Perry, "The Rise of Modernity: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment," *Western Civilization: A Brief History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997), 210-242.

¹⁰ Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986).

¹¹ Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40.

as God's "created co-creators." As we will see later, he argues that the created co-creator concept is a beneficial way to bring religion and science into edifying dialogue. His thoughts on the created co-creator will in many ways serve as a springboard for this paper's exploration of the model.

This is roughly what I bring to this discussion of humans as God's created co-creators. I have happened upon it in my hungering and thirsting for righteousness—a righteousness of right-relationships between God, humans, and all of creation realized in the here and now. We shall now begin to explore this model, with respect to the Christian tradition, to see what lies behind its poetry. I will examine the model of the created co-creator in order to see in what ways it illuminates the discussion of human beings as agents of creative change within this world—change that works toward “a humane and just future.” These are my purposes, and as Langdon Gilkey's comments on Hefner's work remind us, “Our real or authentic purposes must match those of reality itself.”¹² Let us explore what notion of reality is contained within the model of the created co-creator and identify what purposes, if any, human creatorship can seek to serve.

¹² Langdon Gilkey, “Evolution, Culture, and Sin: Responding to Philip Hefner's Proposal,” *Zygon* 30, no. 2 (June 1995), 298.

Chapter One

Humans as Created Agents: An Introduction to the Model of the Created Co-Creator

This chapter will lay out a general and introductory framework of the created co-creator model that will be beneficial for the more specific exploration of human agency within this model. It will discuss the necessary conditions that make this model plausible for an understanding of God and creation within the Christian tradition. It will help to clarify what it means to use this concept as a model. And it will set forth some of the salient features of this model that add to an understanding of human dependence upon God.

I use the term “model” to refer to the created co-creator to help clarify the shape this paper will take. I do not speak of the created co-creator as a theory because I do not lay out an argument that will prove its validity. Hefner has already done this type of work. He formulates hypotheses and tests them against the backdrop of the created co-creator theory. He does this to show that it is a theory that explains the human role in this world in a way that is coherent with scientific findings. Of course, many of these scientific findings were discovered only because of the use of models within science—e.g., the atomic model.

By using the term “model,” I am saying that the concept of the created co-creator can be seen as an image that reflects truths about life. As Avery Dulles says regarding this reflective capacity of images, “When an image is employed reflectively and critically to deepen one’s theoretical understanding of a reality it becomes what is today called a

'model.'"¹³ By using the concept of the created co-creator as a model, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the reality of human co-creative agency, freedom, and responsibility.

Dulles also argues, "For theology...the unanalyzed image is of very limited value."¹⁴ This paper will analyze the created co-creator model through exploration. One of the great benefits of using a model is that it can be explored in relation to lived experience. We are therefore free and encouraged to ask during the course of this paper, does this understanding of freedom or creation relate to our own experiences of these realities? It is obvious that a model will not be directly applicable to all aspects of lived experience. When certain metaphors are turned into models, the limits are often clearly noticeable. For example, one common image used to describe human beings' relationship with Jesus is that Jesus is the shepherd and human beings are the sheep. If this is seen as a model, we can see that it is beneficial for understanding the personal call and affection that Jesus has for others. But it is certainly not beneficial to think of humans as mere followers of the crowd who exercise no more mental capacity than a sheep. A model seeks to use images that are more inclusive than metaphors, but they are still limited in what they can disclose about reality. I use this model of the created co-creator to disclose certain fruitful ways of understanding human beings, not as a way to fully explain our existence.

I will explore the model of the created co-creator by looking at some of the ways in which it seeks to understand human reality. This model, however, can be explored in numerous ways. Therefore, in order to further limit the exploration, I will look at three

¹³ Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974), 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

aspects that are central to the model—human agency, human freedom, and human responsibility. These three aspects of the theological model of the created co-creator are also central to understanding human beings in such fields as philosophy and anthropology. The exploration of this model aims to provide new or at least clearer insight into these aspects of human beings that will help me address the questions that have arisen out of my life experience.

Dulles states, “one may perhaps divide the uses of models in theology into two types, the one explanatory, the other exploratory.”¹⁵ In a certain sense, this paper seeks to use the model of the created co-creator in both ways. It will be explanatory in so far as it brings together understandings of human beings, creativity, freedom, and agency from different backgrounds and synthesizes them into one model. But ultimately it is an exploratory model that discloses new theological insights into human creative work within relationships.

Perhaps it will be helpful at this point to lay out some of the salient features of the created co-creator model that this paper will examine, and see why the aspects of creative agency, freedom, and responsibility are central. Although the concept of co-creatorship is never explicitly explained in the Scriptures, it does appear in some form within the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels, and the Pauline letters. In each of these cases, the imagery of being participants in God’s work is agrarian. For example, in Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Even before the fall, the human was given the responsibility to create an environment so that the garden could flourish. Likewise, when Jesus begins to teach in parables in Mark 4, three out of the four parables he tells involve seeds and agriculture (the parable of the

¹⁵ Ibid, 22.

sower, the parable of the growing seed, and the parable of the mustard seed). Matthew also adds the parable of the weeds among the wheat (13:24-30). And in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, Paul compares his and Apollos' ministry to planting and watering seed. In this respect, Paul states that "we are labourers together with God" and the Corinthian Christians "are God's field" (KJV 3:9).

Looking at the created co-creator model through an agricultural lens provides some insight into the central features of the model. One such feature is that there are certain "givens," and what Christians call "graces," in God's creation. Givens in the agricultural metaphor are weather, soil, and as Mark 4:26-28 asserts, the mystery of the seed's growth—"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." Not all these givens are fit to be called graces. It is not a grace that some soil has rocks and some has weeds. It is not a grace that the caste system is a given into which Indians are born. What makes a given a grace is the ability to use the grace to change the dynamic of other givens.

The created co-creator model does not leave these givens unchanged. Humans can change the givens in the model in a co-creative fashion because of certain graces—especially freedom and creative agency. If we see the created co-creator as a farmer, then we see that the farmer is free to create situations that can improve the growth of the seed. The farmer can create greenhouses that protect the crop from harmful weather and maximize the amount of sunlight it receives. The farmer can create irrigation channels that allow more than the "given" amount of water to reach the crop. The farmer can create fertilizers and pesticides that create differences within the "given" soil. And the

farmer can create genetically modified seeds that enhance crop production. In all these ways, the farmer uses his/her God-given free creative agency to enhance the natural growth of the crop.

Yet, because these creations are done in freedom, they need not always benefit the crop's growth, and they may hinder it. Irrigation has often depleted the levels of safe drinking water. Fertilizers and pesticides contaminate drinking water and kill off other species of crops and animals. If the tragedy of disease strikes an entire crop of genetically modified seeds, they will all perish; whereas the diversity of natural seeds provides safety from such disasters. Because the farmer is free to create such realities, his/her creative actions can sow these figurative "weeds" alongside the crop (Mt. 13:29).

This potential problem of human freedom (to create new realities that are harmful) is addressed within the created co-creator model by the call for humans to be responsible with their creations. In practical terms, this responsibility arises because human freedom should not be used to defeat the purposes it was meant to serve. In agricultural terms, the farmer is using creative means to improve his crop, so that the harvest can be used to nourish and sustain his/her family, fellow humans (whom theology terms "the neighbor"), and other animals. Therefore, if the farmer's actions either hinder the crop or harm those for whom the crop is intended, then the farmer's actions are irresponsible. Thus, the farmer is responsible for using creative means that do not contaminate the neighbor's water and that do not put the neighbor at risk of famine. Thankfully, the same responsible actions that enable the nourishment of the neighbor also enable the nourishment of the farmer him/herself.

This paper will use the model's understanding of free creative agency and

responsible agency to illuminate an intriguing way for humans to understand their role within relationships. The discussion of relationships will often speak of human beings co-creating environments that enable wholesome and just relationships. In using these terms “wholesome” and “just,” I am referring to ideas found in the work of Hefner and Douglas John Hall on co-creatorship. Hall argues that our essential, or authentic, humanity is being-with (communion), whereas our existential, or distorted, humanity is being-against (alienation).¹⁶ The word communion means a sharing of oneself “with” another, but not becoming ontologically one with another.¹⁷ Thus, a wholesome relationship involves two or more individuals participating in “being-with” one another, and in that communion, creating something that did not exist before.

To illustrate this, let us imagine two individuals as musical notes. Each note can exist by itself and create a very pleasing sound. Yet if the two come together, there exists a potential for creating something that neither one could create by itself—i.e., harmony. Of course, there is also the potential to create discordant sounds. These discordant sounds exist when the individual notes are distinct and separated. For this reason I speak of relationships that emphasize the separateness of individuals as being divisive. But it is only by taking this risk of discordance that the individual notes can create harmony. The creation of harmony is a wholesome relationship between the two notes. Each note remains a separate and distinct identity, wholly free, but not isolated. By communing with each other and cooperating with each other they can co-create a harmony that did not exist previously, one that makes a song much more full and symphonic.

If a model is to be useful for providing us with new insights into reality, then we

¹⁶ Hall, 128.

¹⁷ Ibid, 120.

must first grasp a general understanding of this reality. For Philip Hefner, reality is inextricably connected to the concrete essence of nature and the evolutionary process.¹⁸ The most influential advances in our understanding of this reality over the past few centuries have come from our discoveries in the fields of science—from anthropology and sociology to biology and physics. The insights provided by these particular ways of knowing have in many ways challenged our other traditional ways of knowing. Religion, myth, ritual, and even science itself have all been affected and critiqued by the insights science has given us as we seek to understand our world.

Hefner's concept of the created co-creator is rooted in the dialogue between religion and science, and unlike some scientists, he does not feel that these two epistemologies are separate understandings of our world that must remain distinct.¹⁹ Hefner, in proposing his theory of the created co-creator, takes a more constructive approach to religion and science dialogue. Hefner believes that religion has made a poor attempt at integrating scientific discoveries into human understandings of *meaning* and *purpose*—topics that are all too often left out of scientific debate because they do not seem to lie within its realm of knowledge. Hefner offers his theory of the created co-creator to help us make the connections between science and the humans doing science. He attempts to construct this theory of human beings that will help explore the questions: "How do we relate what we know as empirical facts and the larger or ultimate meaning of those facts? How do we establish a fit between the facts of our experience and larger

¹⁸ Hefner, 42.

¹⁹ Even Stephen J. Gould in his valiant attempt to bring religion and science into dialogue, elected to use the term NOMA, meaning non-overlapping magisteria, to emphasize that these two ways of knowing must always remain separate. In Gould's view, science and religion could participate in dialogue, but they would always remain separate and distinct magisteria. Stephen J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999).

meanings?"²⁰ This paper will use religious language within the Christian tradition to help illuminate these questions of meaning.

Hefner's proposal, with reference to these questions, is to view human beings as

God's created co-creators whose purpose is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us—the nature that is not only our own genetic heritage, but also the entire human community and the evolutionary and ecological reality in which and to which we belong. Exercising this agency is said to be God's will for humans.²¹

That is to say, humans have emerged from nature by God's design to use their free creative agency to aid God in creating a safe and free world for all of creation. Hefner's goal is to show that this proposal is completely compatible with the empirical findings of science and also gives us answers to the more existential questions of how our empirical understandings relate to the subjective understandings of our world, God, and ourselves. We will use the concept of the created co-creator to explore the three features Hefner singles out (agency, freedom, and a wholesome future) within the Christian tradition.

The concept of the created co-creator affirms the role of the human being as important for the shaping of the future. It therefore rules out the notion of an all-controlling God who has already shaped the future. In an essay on the co-creator motif in the Genesis creation story, Terence E. Fretheim states that reality "is a highly dynamic situation in which the future is open to a number of possibilities and in which creaturely activity is crucial for proper creational developments."²² After all, if humans have a genuine role in the creation of the future, then they must have at least some power and control of their own. God is best seen as one who shares power, and the future is best

²⁰ Hefner, 3.

²¹ Hefner, 27.

²² Fretheim, 15.

seen as open-ended. The emphasis the model places upon the role of human co-creative action rules out a hierarchical view of creation. Genuine partnership levels the playing field of the participants. It values the differences of those involved, but it recognizes that the partner is necessary for co-creation.

Within the notion of the created co-creator, it is essential that God can be seen as manifest through natural occurrences, especially for Hefner. He makes the connection between God and the natural world clear when he states, "The ultimate is not abstract, but rather is accessible only in the concreteness of life."²³ The only way of knowing that we as human beings possess is mediated through our central nervous system (matter), and therefore we can only access those things that interact with that matter. Hefner makes this clear by stating, "Nature is the medium through which the world, including human beings, receives knowledge, as well as grace. If God is brought into the discussion, then nature is the medium of divine knowledge and grace."²⁴ Thus it is only natural that the knowledge we have of God is firmly rooted in nature.

Other theologians working with the idea of co-creatorship also stress the importance of grace mediated through nature. Douglas John Hall, in his work on human stewardship, agrees with Hefner about the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of nature and grace within the Christian tradition. He states,

Grace is dialectically related to nature...Grace is simply not equated with natural occurrence, because such an equation would deprive the human spirit of the sense of wonder at the unusual, the unexpected, the undeserved. But neither is grace to be perceived as a supernatural alternative to nature.²⁵

The gifts that God gives to creation are mediated through that creation. We must be

²³ Hefner, 33.

²⁴ Hefner, 42.

²⁵ Hall, 135.

careful not to see grace as abstract and supernatural. If grace is at all accessible to creatures, then it must be accessible through the concreteness of nature. This relationship between nature and grace is important for making the created co-creator model plausible in light of today's scientific knowledge. After all, "faith does not transport the believer to some place other than this world, God's creation."²⁶

It may appear that the idea of the interrelatedness of nature and grace and even the idea of the created co-creator itself "immediately suggest pantheistic arrogance, [in which] the boundary between the Creator and the creature has been obliterated."²⁷ We must note that the insistence on the importance of the knowledge of God being mediated through nature in no way implies a pantheistic view that God is nature and nature is God. If the created co-creator model comes from within the Christian tradition, then it should firmly uphold the classical Christian doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) and *creatio continua* (continuing creation). Although Hefner seems to be heavily influenced by process theology, he does not seem to get caught up in the problems that process theologians have faced with their doctrine of creation.²⁸ Whereas it might be interesting to see how the created co-creator might relate to other

²⁶ Paul R. Sponheim, *The Pulse of Creation: God and the Transformation of the World* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1999), 71.

²⁷ E. L. Allen, *Freedom in God: A Guide to the Thought of Nicholas Berdyaev* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1950), 19.

²⁸ Typically, process theologians have had difficulties with the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* because of its purely irrational insistence that something can come from nothing. They instead suggest that creation is best understood as a form of emanation coming from God's essence. Of course, pure pantheism is quickly rejected within the Christian tradition, so process theologians have settled more for a panentheism—seeing creation as emanating from God's being, yet also seeing some aspect of God's being transcending creation. For a more in depth look at the debate between *creatio ex nihilo* and emanationism see: Robert Oakes, "Emanation *Ex Deus*: A Defense," *American Philosophic Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (April 1992), 163-171. and Francis Young, "Creatio *Ex Nihilo*: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991), 139-151. Also for a look at one very early pioneer who tried to bridge the gap between *ex nihilo* and emanationism see: Harry A. Wolfson, "The Identification of *Ex Nihilo* With Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa," *Harvard Theological Review* 63, no.1 (1970), 53-60. This will also give insight into the discussion between Eastern and Western views of creation discussed below.

philosophical views of creation, we will limit our discussion to this model's compatibility with the Christian doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continua*. After all, the model of the created co-creator is not ultimately concerned with the origin of creation but with continuing creation into the future—the dynamic process of becoming.

The reason for an insistence upon a compatibility with *creatio ex nihilo* is that it explains the dependency that is necessary for a created co-creator. Dependence is a central theme for both a Christian and a scientific understanding of the human being. If humans are indeed an emergent species in the evolutionary process, then we are fully dependent on that natural process for giving us life. And within the Christian tradition, Friedrich Schleiermacher makes it clear that there can be no escaping human's "consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."²⁹ This feeling of dependence on God has traditionally been upheld within the Christian faith under the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. As Frances Young explains, "It is a way of affirming the dependence and contingency of creation, and the free gracious act of God in creation arising from no necessity."³⁰ Thus, *creatio ex nihilo* is a way of upholding that God transcends creation, God wills creation, and creation is dependent upon God for its being and purpose. And as Schleiermacher reminds us, this dependence emphasizes the important role relationships should play in an understanding of human beings. Indeed, this human dependency upon relationships is the aspect of the created co-creator model that this paper stresses the most.

Hefner pays tribute to these obligations he has from both the traditions of science

²⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, Eds. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, n.d.), 12.

³⁰ Francis Young, "Creatio Ex Nihilo: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991), 139-151.

and religion by using the term "created." He states, "The term *created* indicates that the human species did not design its own nature or its role in the world," and when it is placed in a theological context this "concept speaks of the primacy of God and the divine creating activity."³¹ The fact that humans as well as all creatures are dependent upon God for their existence and that God wills a purpose for creation are important factors to keep in mind as we move into the discussion of humans as co-creators with God. Being dependent upon God means that all co-creative work is derived from the graces that God bestows upon human beings. For this reason, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* will serve as an important source for illuminating our exploration of human creation via agency, freedom and responsibility.

There is one final element of the created co-creator model that will be helpful to consider before we begin our specific look at the human co-creator. Central to the model is the traditional Hebrew understanding of a "good" creation. The Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev (1847-1948) was very critical of the typical understanding of sin within the Western tradition that did not stress the goodness of creation and the possibility of co-creatorship. As E.L. Allen says, "One of Berdyaev's criticisms of Western Christianity is that in the person of its great representatives such as Augustine and Luther it has been obsessed with sin."³² At least within the Western Christian traditions, nature has been viewed as a source of suffering and sin for humans. Nature is what gives us our base, animal-like desires and turns a good man into "a carnal, outward, or old man."³³ This stems from a misinterpretation of Augustine's description of nature

³¹ Hefner, 36.

³² Allen, 21.

³³ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, ed. J. M. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 26.

as totally depraved and his devaluing freedom. Hefner argues that no understanding of what Augustine meant by the total depravity of nature "is adequate if it does not take into account this total complex of issues: personal experience, biblical accounts, liturgical practice, and political-social contexts" surrounding Augustine's writings.³⁴ However, the Eastern Christian tradition has held a different understanding of nature and sin. Stemming from the work of Gregory of Nyssa, the Eastern view holds that it is the gift of freedom given by God to humans that causes sin and the corruption of this goodness.³⁵ According to this view, the West "misunderstood the significance of freedom. It seemed to impose a new fatalism that denied the goodness of creation."³⁶ But at its core, nature is good, not depraved (the consequences of human freedom's corruption of this goodness will be discussed in chapter 3).

The essential goodness of creation is crucial for an understanding of the created co-creator. If humans are to have any hope of making choices that will have wholesome and edifying consequences for all of creation, then humans as well as all of creation need to have at least the potential for goodness. Thus, the emergence within the Western tradition of the notion of co-creatorship can be seen as the West drawing upon a tradition that has been preserved in the East—the elevation of freedom within the discussion of sin and creation. Indeed, Hefner sees his work as doing just this type of bridging activity. "The sin that arises in the activity generated by those gifts with which we were endowed at our creation," he writes, "would support a view that is rooted in both West and East."³⁷ But in reality, it is simply reclaiming the Hebrew assertion of a good creation.

³⁴ Hefner, 126.

³⁵ Hefner, 129.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

The created co-creator model can be seen as a way for bringing freedom (undervalued in the West because of sin) into the center of the discussion of human beings. But there is a definite danger of overemphasizing freedom. Sponheim notes these two extreme views concerning the role of freedom:

The story of Christendom is filled with instances where the faith is understood in such a way that nothing transformative can be done now, at least by the worthless wretches human beings represent. Or in what may only appear to be an opposite dynamic, the believer acts, but with an absoluteness that puts him apart from or even against others.³⁸

Whereas underemphasizing the value of freedom can leave humans being totally depraved and incapable of any co-creative work, overemphasizing freedom can isolate humans. The created co-creator model seeks a balance between these two extremes, in which the individual's freedom is valued in such a way that it unites people in harmonious relationships.

This general exploration of the created co-creator framework gives insight into certain ideas that will be necessary for exploring the specific aspects of co-creative agency within the rest of the paper. We have shown that the model does not allow for an understanding of God as all-controlling. The model affirms an understanding that grace is mediated through nature. It also has an understanding of God as the sole Creator who creates *ex nihilo*. And it contains an understanding of nature as essentially good, but corrupted by sin.

The model's emphasis on the goodness of creation is of course reported in Genesis 1. This passage also helps us understand a dynamic and interactive Creator. The fact that God is able to view what God has created and comment on it shows that God experiences creation and is changed by it. Bernhard Anderson reminds us that a dynamic

³⁸ Sponheim, 114.

and relational God is central within the Bible:

The Hebrew Bible does not have the equivalent of the Greek term *kosmos*, which suggests the view of the universe as a rationally constituted and self-sustaining structure of reality. Instead, it speaks of the relationship between the Creator and the creation.³⁹

And as Terence Fretheim explains, "God sees the created, God is affected by what has been created, and God responds in varying ways to what has been experienced. Hence, once again, God is one whose creative activity is at least in part determined by that which is not God."⁴⁰ The most influential of these non-divine shapers of divine creativity are God's created co-creators—human beings.

³⁹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 27.

⁴⁰ Fretheim, 14-15.

Chapter Two

Humans as Co-Creative Agents

We have just explored some of the general components of the created co-creator model's understanding of God and nature within the Christian tradition. Now we will focus our attention on understanding what conditions and qualities are necessary for humans to be called co-creators. This model portrays humans as creative agents. Therefore, we will need to explore in what (if any) capacity human activity can be described as creation. We will define agency generally as the capacity for action, and specifically within this context as the capacity to act creatively—i.e., to posit future, non-existent possibilities and act upon them.

To discuss properly what humans can create, it will be helpful to examine how Hefner speaks of the co-creator within this model. Hefner describes the created co-creator's role as "to be the agency" for enabling a free creation.⁴¹ It is important to have a general understanding of agency and humans as agents before we look specifically at creative agency.

In its simplest and most general definition, agency simply means the capacity to act. An agent is the one who performs an action. Agency, when used in such a broad way, is not a capacity limited to human beings. A dog is an agent of affection when its owner comes home. A tornado is an agent of destruction to things that come in its path. The heat of the earth's core is an agent of movement for the continental plates.

It might seem strange to be discussing agency in terms that are non-specific to humans, given that this paper is an exploration of human co-creativity. But

⁴¹ Hefner, 27.

understanding agency as simply the power to act is a much better understanding of agency within the model than understanding agency as acting as a representative for another—e.g., an FBI agent or an insurance agent.⁴² Seeing agency as a mere representation of an authority figure limits the discussion of co-creatorship in many ways. This view of agency allows the agent to act only in ways representative of the authority. This would portray humans as mere puppets at the mercy of their Creator. It also implies a hierarchical relationship between the agent and the authority that is not applicable within a model of the created co-creator. Although it is important to stress the co-creator's dependence on the Creator, humans are co-creators and therefore needed partners in creation. Thus, it is not helpful to look at humans as an agent *for* God (the representative view of agency), but I hope to show that it is helpful to look at humans as agents *of* God's creativity—i.e., that humans can use their God-given creative agency to create dynamics within relationships that did not previously exist, and that are of the same wholesome and loving manner as God's creations.

Although agency is not properly seen within this model as acting as God's representative with *only* the authority given by God, it is important to recognize agency as a gift God gives to humans—a grace. This is crucial to remember, because after all, the human co-creator is also *created* in this model. Our agency (the ability to act) is, at this most fundamental level, one of those aspects of humanity for which we are dependent upon God. As we move further into our understanding of human creative agency, we will briefly distinguish why our agency's dependence does not make us mere puppet representatives of God (but this will be more comprehensively examined in the

⁴² This would be the view of agency contained within Webster's definition of an agent: "One entrusted with the business of another; one empowered to act for another." *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "agency."

next chapter's discussion of freedom). Dependency simply means that our existence is derived from God, and that God is the primary source of all creative acts. We are dependent on God for enabling us to act creatively, but because we are given this grace, we are able to use it in a way that is free from God's directing.

Within the created co-creator model as well as the Genesis creation story, agency is a gift, but it is a gift we possess and use. As Terence Fretheim says, "the divine sovereignty in creation is understood, not in terms of absolute divine control, but as a sovereignty that gives power over to the created for the sake of a relationship of integrity."⁴³ This giving of power is precisely what enables humans to be called co-creators. One specific power given is the power of creative agency—the power to act intentionally and creatively. Fretheim notes that this grace is given to establish a relationship of integrity. Integrity comes from the Latin word *integritas* meaning wholeness or soundness.⁴⁴ Thus, this relates back to the concept of wholeness and harmony within relationships. We must now ask, what makes the gift of agency specifically human, and why is it concerned with relationships of integrity?

Relationships are in fact very important for distinguishing between human-specific agency and God's agency. Within the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* God is in relation to nothing outside of God's self before God creates. There is no "other" with whom God can have a relationship. And when God uses God's creative agency to create *ex nihilo*, there is no "other" whom God's creation will affect. Creation brings the "other" into existence. In contrast, humans, being created, are always in relationship with an "other"—both the ontological "other," God, and any created being "other" than

⁴³ Fretheim, 20.

⁴⁴ Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "integrity."

oneself.

Paul R. Sponheim in his exploration of the co-creator's role in transforming the world with God, puts it this way: "The gift, the givenness, of the other is the promise of creation."⁴⁵ The notion that we as created beings always stand in relation to God is what Luther's principle of *coram deo* points to. In fact, as Marsha M. Wilfong states in her discussion of creation, we are always found in three central types of relationships—"...with God, within human community, and with the rest of creation."⁴⁶ We cannot escape being the other for whom God intends a relationship. Nor can we escape being in relationships with other humans and the rest of creation.

As Christians, we believe in this constant gift of relationship because God has shown God is committed to the creation through the person of Jesus Christ—"God's commitment to the creation is such that there is indeed a gift, the gift of relationship. Christian faith is about relationship."⁴⁷ Since God is committed to a relationship with creation, we can be confident that we are always in a key, basic relationship. Because we are creatures of a relational God, we are created *in* relationships. It is God's creative agency that brings these relationships into existence. God's creativity with regard to relationships has been a crucial understanding for Trinitarian work. From such theologians as Jürgen Moltmann to Elizabeth A. Johnson, the relational aspect of the Trinity provides insight into the way God creatively works within relationships.⁴⁸

But humans are also created *for* relationships. This does not have the same

⁴⁵Sponheim, 89.

⁴⁶ Marsha M. Wilfong, "Human Creation in Canonical Context: Genesis 1:26-31 and Beyond," *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*, ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 42.

⁴⁷ Sponheim, 109.

⁴⁸ See Paul D. Molnar, "The Function of the Trinity in Moltmann's Ecological Doctrine of Creation," *Theological Studies* 51, no. 4 (Dec. 1990): 673-697, and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

“givenness” as being created *in* relationships. Sponheim uses the story of Genesis 2 to argue this point: “With the gift of the image of God we are both created in and called toward relationship with the other.”⁴⁹ We are called to engage in new, creative relationships. As the Christian existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (whose writings on subjectivity illuminate the notion of relationships within the created co-creator model) observes, Christians are meant to be “infinitely interested in the reality of another.”⁵⁰ We must have an agency that enables us to become infinitely concerned about the other in our relationships. In other words, we must be able to shape the relationships we are in and not be mere passive participants. Being created *for* relationships means there is an open-endedness to our relationships in which we can either create an infinite interest in the other—or not. Only those relationships in which both parties pursue interest in the other have the potential for wholesomeness. An exploration of our specifically human creative agency will help shed light on how our creative agency enables the co-creation of relationships.

Because agency does not specifically refer to a human capacity, it is usually accompanied by a specifier such as within the ethical discussion of humans as moral agents. This use of the term “agency” refers to humans as actors who act within the ethical mode of existence. Kierkegaard would distinguish between a person who consciously acts within the ethical “sphere” of existence (i.e., one who intentionally makes the decision to take the good and the bad seriously in his/her life) and one who

⁴⁹ Sponheim, 71.

⁵⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the ‘Philosophical Fragments,’” *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), 228.

acts without any conscious reflection about the consequences.⁵¹ This is why ethicists will not claim that a baby is a moral agent, or that an earthquake is a moral agent. But whether or not it is an action consciously done in the ethical sphere, there is no escaping the role self-conscious human beings have as moral agents because they are always in relationships. The contiguous, relational bonds that compose human existence are always vibrating with the consequences of human actions. Thus, the conscious action always involves the ethical because it always has an effect upon others. As Kierkegaard says, "Whenever in a stricter sense there is question of an either/or, one can always be sure that the ethical is involved."⁵²

Instead of speaking of humans as moral agents, the created co-creator model requires us to speak of humans as creative agents. But perhaps it will be helpful to build on the "sphere" language of moral agency and say that as created co-creators, humans act within the "sphere" of creation. Thus, to refer to creative agency is to refer to humans as creative agents whose actions occur specifically within the realm of creation. This is as true for creative agency as for moral agency because humans are relational. The actions we perform (or do not perform) will always "create" new dynamics for the relationships in which we are engaged. Every action that we take will have some intended or unintended effect upon the relationships we have with God, with other humans, and with the whole creation. Looking at creation within the context of relationships offers a way of talking about how human action can be called creation or, more appropriately, co-creation.

As with moral agency, a distinction should be made between those creative acts

⁵¹ Soren Kierkegaard, "Either/Or," *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), 96.

⁵² *Ibid*, 105.

that are done consciously and those that are not. Driving of my gas-powered car, for example, is an action that indirectly helps to create unjust and oppressive relationships the whole world over. Yet if I am not conscious of this, or of intentionally choosing to create these relationships, my responsibility will not be the same as one who is conscious of these relationships. If I am conscious of how my actions affect my relationships and conscious of how I can change that, then my responsibility is raised to a new level (for a more comprehensive view of responsibility within the model see Chapter Four). In the process of writing this paper, my awareness of the influence my actions have upon relationships has greatly increased. It is my hope that by defining the effect our actions have on relationships as "creation," others will also become more aware.

When we hear the word "creation," especially within a Christian context, we may imagine a mysterious, even magical, act. This comes from the influence of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* within the Christian tradition. Robert Oakes defines the classical interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo* as the "Presto-theory" of creation because God seems like a magician who is able to bring forth something out of what was nothing at the mere utterance of a word (much like pulling a rabbit out of a hat).⁵³ Although the theory that something can come from nothing is irrational, illogical, and absurd, humans can in some way still hold that it might at least be a viable way of creating for God. In certain respects, human creativity does appear to be a form of *creatio ex nihilo* (language, art, babies) because it can create things so novel and so unique. We will explore in the next chapter how the case for human *creatio ex nihilo* can be made. But for now, our rational minds' insistence on causal dependency and our dependency on God insist that our

⁵³ Robert Oakes, "Emanation *Ex Deus*: A Defense," *American Philosophic Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (April 1992), 164.

creation is not wholly independent. We do not have the same power of creative agency as God, but we must ask, can we use our own creative power in a *manner* that is similar to the *manner* in which God uses creative power? This question will be addressed in Chapter Four. Therefore, let us stay focused on what human beings can actually create.

If we see creation as simply the bringing into existence of that which did not exist before, then here are a few things that we can say human beings create, not in a “presto” fashion but through much labor and use of materials that creation and history have provided: Art, life, war, meaning. There are also those aspects of culture that Hefner frequently uses as examples: society, institutions, communication. If we examine each of these (and any other example of human creation) we will find a common theme running through them—relationships. The creation of art involves the relationship between the artist, the idea, the medium and the viewer. The creation of life involves a relationship between a mother and a father (no matter how distant) and the new life created. The creation of war involves the relationship between two or more hostile parties. The creation of meaning involves a relationship between an individual and his/her experience of the world. The creation of society involves the relationship between a large group of citizens. The creation of institutions involves the relationship between a community of people and a structure of some kind. And the creation of communication involves the relationship between two or more people and the relationship between certain phonemes or gestures and larger meanings. Thus, at the center of human creation are relationships.

It is senseless to talk about human creation without talking about relationships. Therefore, a discussion of human creative agency within the model of a created co-

creator must start with the most fundamental and important thing that humans create, relationships. As previously noted, some relationships are given. Humans do not create their relationship with God, nor does a baby create its relationship with its parents. Even though these relationships are not our own creation, we are able to *co-create* the quality and type of relationship that exists. Our actions define our relationships. Just because a relationship is given does not mean that it has a form. The participants within the relationship have the power to create its form by their choice of action or inaction. Within a given relationship, we still have the agency to contribute to the creation of a just or unjust relationship, a constructive or a destructive relationship, a free or an oppressive relationship. However, there is a great risk involved with the co-creation of relationships. Because relationships involve an other, there is always the possibility that the other will not be creating the same type of relationship that the partner is creating. A relationship where one person works toward creating justice and the other, toward creating injustice, will create a very enigmatic relationship. The dynamics of relationships must be created together. Therefore, those involved in relationships are always co-creators. Harmony, as well as discordance, is the participation of two or more notes that co-create the new sound.

Human co-creation of relationships is a demonstration of agency, i.e., it involves action. Nicholas Berdyaev wrote much about the nature of human creativity.⁵⁴ He states, "Creativeness is action. It presupposes overcoming difficulties and there is an element of

⁵⁴ Berdyaev's emphasis on creativity comes from his view that creativity is the ultimate goal of human existence. He felt that soon the Eighth Day of Creation would dawn in which humans would participate in the creative transformation the world. Creativity is that which allows humans to participate in divine life. See M. M. Davy, *Nicolas Berdyaev: Man of the Eighth Day*, trans. Leonora Siepmann, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967).

labor in it.”⁵⁵ We can posit the idea or the vision of how a relationship might look, but this does not create the relationship. Only when we act upon that vision is the relationship “created” in a real and concrete sense. Thus, our co-creation of relationships is indeed a genuine agency because it requires action. It is true that we can create dynamics of a relationship by choosing not to act, but this cannot be seen as “creative.” It is only when one brings creatively posited non-existent realities into being that creativity is actualized.

We have seen that agency, within a specific human context of creation, means the ability to act in a creative fashion—to make something new with what is given. We have shown that human actions occur within the creative realm of existence because we are relational creatures. In fact, it is the dynamics of relationships that are the most important things humans create. In this way, our creative agency is similar to God’s. As soon as God created an other, God also created a relationship between God’s self and the creation. Although the other is a given for humans, our creative acts also co-create relationships. Thus, it seems that the idea of a creative agent within the model of the created co-creator is a reasonable and beneficial way (in the sense of raising one’s awareness) to understand human beings, especially when one considers the co-creation of relationships. But first we must explain what makes human creative agency not a mere branch of God’s creative agency. We will need to explore how creative agency within this model is a gift that we can freely utilize.

Underlying this whole discussion of creative agency is the assumption that if humans are co-creative agents, then they must also be free agents. Creativity is built upon the capacity to posit future possibilities that do not exist. To be genuine and

⁵⁵ Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 296.

authentic creation, one should have access to more than what exists (future possibilities). And to be a genuine and authentic agent, one must be able to use the gift freely. In the model of the created co-creator human beings are not just agents who possess God's authority; they are free agents with their own, free authority. Will and intentionality are integral to the model of the co-creator. We will now explore the questions: Is it plausible and fruitful to see human creative agency as free? and What do we mean by freedom?

Chapter Three

Humans as Free Agents

Many thinkers have maintained that the defining factor for human beings is freedom.⁵⁶ Throughout history, human freedom has been variously defined in terms of will, choice, consciousness, action, etc. This chapter will focus on an understanding of freedom within the context of the created co-creator model. Specifically, it will explore the interrelatedness of freedom and creativity. Hefner clearly recognizes the importance for the created co-creator's agency to be a free agency. In his definition of the created co-creator he says that the human is "to be the agency, acting in freedom."⁵⁷ In this chapter, I will explore what freedom is within the specific context of human relationships. I will describe freedom's role in the co-creation of relationships, and see whether or not freedom to create is best understood as a freedom of choice or as a broader state of grace. I will also see what influence freedom has on the creation of wholesome and divisive relationships.

The exploration of freedom will be divided into two main sections based on a distinction made by Nicholas Berdyaev. E.L. Allen explains,

Berdyaev makes an important distinction between two senses of the word freedom, between freedom as a means and freedom as an end. By the first we mean freedom to direct one's own life, to choose between good and evil as one understands them; by the second the freedom which consists in liberation from one's lower nature for the service of what is highest and best.⁵⁸

Berdyaev argues that theology often takes into account the second kind of freedom and

⁵⁶ For a good overview of this history see David Elton Trueblood's chapter on freedom in his *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper Row, 1957), 275-290.

⁵⁷ Hefner, 33.

⁵⁸ Allen, 26.

neglects the first. Thus, it is important to heed Berdyaev's warning and first focus on how freedom is a means. This will provide us with a solid foundation on which to build an understanding of freedom as an end in Chapter Four.

As with agency, it is important to note that within the model, freedom is another attribute of the created co-creator that comes from the creature's dependence. It is another gift God gives. By definition, freedom is a gift that we can control. According to Berdyaev, "A determined freedom is not freedom at all."⁵⁹ Yet within the model of the created co-creator, Hefner understands freedom as a determined creation of the evolutionary process—"freedom itself has emerged from a causal process."⁶⁰ Given Hefner's understanding of the coherence of nature and grace, freedom is a gift, but a determined gift. How can we account for these two different stances on freedom as determined?

Underlying the notions of freedom for both Berdyaev and Hefner is the sense that freedom is a given that is unavoidable. In that sense it is determined. Hefner claims, "The unavoidableness of freedom underscores its essential character for human becoming."⁶¹ Humans are able to be called co-creators precisely because they are determined to be free by the grace of their created nature. At no time are we restricted in our free creations, and our free creations are always affecting our relationships. The created co-creator is free, and even if he/she chooses to surrender that freedom in one form or another, this can in no way change his/her essential freedom, for there is always the possibility to do otherwise.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Berdyaev, "The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar," *Nicholas Berdyaev: On Freedom*, URL: <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyaev/qf.htm>

⁶⁰ Hefner, 97.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Although we have seen that freedom is an unavoidable given within the created co-creator model, it is still necessary to understand the nature of this gift. Freedom is crucial to the Christian understanding of creation, for as Berdyaev says, "Only he [sic] who is free, creates."⁶² Perhaps by looking at the freedom of God established within the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, we can gain a better understanding of the created co-creator's freedom. Gerhard May, in his book on the early history of the *creatio ex nihilo* doctrine, says the central theme of *creatio ex nihilo* is that "there could be nothing unoriginate except God and that no limits existed to God's creative capability."⁶³ This means that God created the world out of a state of absolute freedom. God was not bound to any relationship when God created. God freely chose to create and God freely chose to enter into a relationship with that creation. But we have noted that this is not the case for human beings. Sponheim reminds us of this when he states, "We creatures are *necessarily* connected with the other in some kind of relationship. God is *freely* committed to the other in love."⁶⁴ Though we clearly do not have the absolute freedom God has to choose to be in relationship, we do have the freedom to create, in part, the type of relationships in which we participate. Thus, like God, we are free to co-create a committed relationship or an uncommitted relationship.

More importantly, *creatio ex nihilo* emphasizes that God creates because God wills. The early Church Fathers who developed the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* made it clear that the distinction between Neo-Platonic emanationism and the Christian doctrine

⁶² Nicholas Berdyaev, "The Meaning of the Creative Act." *Nicholas Berdyaev: On Creativity*. URL: <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyaev/qc.htm>

⁶³ Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 150.

⁶⁴ Sponheim, 98.

was that "emanation is by nature; creation is by will."⁶⁵ To be a creator means that new things do not just appear because it is part of the creator's nature, but they appear because the creator wills them. Therefore, if humans are to be called co-creators, they must have the capacity to will their creations' existence. As we continue to explore the co-creator's capacity for freedom, it will be helpful to keep in mind that will is always involved within creation.

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* also provides us with an understanding of freedom as the source for creation. Freedom does not appear to be a thing that is created by God. It is the state in which God creates. Inasmuch as we say that God created out of nothing, we must also say that God created out of freedom. Many Christian theologians, influenced by Neo-Platonism, ascribe the nothingness out of which God creates as potential, i.e., freedom.⁶⁶ The nothingness of freedom is the potential for creation. Since freedom was a state God created within before any creation occurred, freedom is non-creation.⁶⁷

Coming from an existentialist tradition, Berdyaev also believes strongly that freedom is best seen as nothingness. He states, "creation on the other hand springs from freedom...Creation is out of nothing, i.e. out of freedom, for freedom *is* nothing."⁶⁸ In this sense, when humans create, they do create out of nothing. All creation is an outgrowth of freedom—freedom is the foundation. If an act is not free it cannot be called

⁶⁵ Harry A. Wolfson, "The Identification of *Ex Nihilo* With Emanation in Gregory of Nyssa," *Harvard Theological Review* 63, no.1 (1970), 55.

⁶⁶ Francis Young, "*Creatio Ex Nihilo*: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991), 146.

⁶⁷ The Greeks made a distinction between nothing in terms of *ouk on* ("total negation of everything") and *me on* (the "absence of some particular"). *Creatio ex nihilo* maintains that God did not create out of a substance of nothingness but out of absolute nothingness (*ouk on*). From George S. Hendry, "Nothing," *Theology Today* 39, no. 2 (July 1982), 281.

⁶⁸ Berdyaev, *Destiny Of Man*, 65.

creative. But the potential for this creativity is essentially nothing and pure freedom. Thus the created co-creator model shows “man’s [sic] creativeness is similar to God’s [occurring within the nothingness of freedom], but God does not need any material for His [sic] creation, while man does.”⁶⁹ By looking at freedom we see that human creative agency is in some ways analogous to God’s. Without this similarity between human creative agency and God’s creative agency there is no hope that humans can be co-creators. Freedom is a gift given to us to enable our creative agency to be like God’s.

The understanding of creation as a product of the nothingness of freedom is important within the model because it provides a way of talking specifically about human creative agency. One of the most fundamental aspects of human creative agency is the ability to posit non-existent possibilities. As Berdyaev says, “An original creative work always includes an element of freedom and that is the ‘nothing’ out of which the new, the not yet existent, is created.”⁷⁰ The creative idea is only creative if it is something new. The ability to posit such a new vision requires the human to be able to freely create the vision out of something that does not exist—non-being, in the sense of *me on* not *ouk on*. Of course what makes this creative and what makes this an agency is our ability to *freely* act upon these possibilities. The created co-creator is once again dependent for this specific capacity—“dependent on the existence of a well-developed intelligence, which makes it possible to explore alternative courses of action and to choose one or another in view of the anticipated consequences.”⁷¹ Francisco J. Ayala carefully words this sentence to be sure that we do not misunderstand human freedom as simply freedom of

⁶⁹ Ibid, 66.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Francisco J. Ayala, “So Human an Animal: Evolution and Ethics,” *Science and Theology*, ed. Ted Peters, (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1998), 130

choice. There is, more importantly, the freedom to posit courses of action and envision the consequences of these actions. This type of freedom suggests the ability to truly create that which does not exist.

Choice is a very big part of human freedom within the created co-creator model. But, considering the nature of creativity, there must be more to freedom within the model than just choice. Berdyaev makes it quite clear that freedom of choice, or free will, is not the essence of freedom at all. "Freedom of will is in no sense creative, and instead of liberating man [sic] keeps him in perpetual fear...he cannot create anything through that freedom, but can only accept or reject what is given him from without."⁷² Freedom of choice means that humans simply choose between the options that are provided through grace and history. There is nothing creative about choosing what is already given. That would mean that the farmer is free to choose between good soil and rocky soil, but is not free to create any new soil conditions for the seed. Free creative agency means that humans can create other options and choose to act upon those. As co-creators, we have the freedom to create choices that did not exist and the freedom to create relationships that did not exist. Since the model of a created co-creator is founded upon free creative agency, freedom of choice is not an adequate definition of freedom because freedom must be a grace that is unlimited.

We have set forth some of the characteristics of freedom and seen which understandings of freedom work well for co-creative agency. But we still have not seen how freedom can be used as a means as Berdyaev says. It is clear from what was stated above that freedom is not properly understood as a tool that we can choose to use here and not use there. It is an always-present condition of being a creator and being a human.

⁷² Berdyaev, *Destiny Of Man*, 80.

It is impossible for humans not to use their freedom. But just because we must always use freedom does not mean we must always use it in the same way. The uses and application of our freedom are freely exercised. That is what makes freedom a means—being able to conduct one's agency in whatever way one wants.

Since this exploration of the created co-creator is focused on relationships, it is important to ask, how does freedom influence the creation of our relationships? Our ability to posit future possibilities means that we can envision future relationships and work toward making them a reality. Through this agency, humans can also freely create the quality of relationships in which they are currently involved. In a broader sense, freedom is the means for creating what Fretheim calls a "relationship of integrity."⁷³ It is difficult to image a relationship without freedom (e.g., a master and slave) being integral and wholesome. When one party is not able to act in freedom, it is difficult to characterize the relationship as good. The suppression of an individual's freedom within relationships instead causes divisions between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The centrality of freedom within relationships of integrity is important for the Christian because of the role love plays in our understanding of God. Any relationship will not be wholesome unless it grants the other freedom, and this is nowhere more apparent than in a relationship of love. For Christians there is no doubt that the relationship God has with God's creation is built on love—"For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). W. H. Vanstone, in his work *The Risk of Love*, establishes the importance of freedom within a loving relationship when he states, "That which professes to be love is exposed as false if it is recognized as limited."⁷⁴ Therefore, God

⁷³ Fretheim, 20.

⁷⁴ W.H. Vanstone, *The Risk of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 42.

in wishing to hold God's self accountable to an authentic, loving relationship with creation, put no limits on the freedom humans have. God cannot establish wholesome relationships if God is fully in control—"Love is activity for the sake of an *other*: and where the object of love is wholly under the control of the one who loves, that object is no longer an other."⁷⁵ The other must have the freedom to create its own purpose and relationship. The created co-creator model's understanding of free creative agency makes room for the important notion of love (but a more in-depth exploration of love within the model will occur in the next chapter).

Thus, freedom is a means for co-creating authentic and wholesome relationships when it is used in a manner that does not suppress the freedom of the other. There is great risk in this type of relationship: a risk that the other will not reciprocate the relationship in a free and loving way. If freedom is the gift that enables humans to use their creative agency as a way to establish just and wholesome relationships, then freedom is also the gift that enables humans to use their creative agency to establish unjust and divisive relationships.

There is a problem with this open-ended capability that the created co-creator has to posit future possibilities and act on them. The problem, as Sponheim explains, is that "in this drama of creaturely life there is possibility, and so ambiguity."⁷⁶ The ambiguity that arises out of our free creative agency is that it can be used for either the creation of relationships of integrity or relationships of brokenness (and anything in-between). This ambiguity is clearly captured within the Creation chapters of Genesis. Genesis 4 ends with humans using their creative agency to make beneficial things like dwellings, musical

⁷⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁷⁶ Sponheim, 29.

instruments and tools (Gen. 4:20-22). But the chapter begins with a human who uses his creative agency to kill his brother (Gen. 4:1-16). Murder is the creation of a relationship that is the complete antithesis of integrity. Death is isolation, and disunity from all relationships. The antinomy of freedom is that it empowers the creative agency of the created co-creator to be used in both ways.

Gilkey, in his review of Hefner's notion of the created co-creator, is critical of Hefner's work because it fails to address such antinomies within free creative agency. He argues that Hefner spends too much time focusing on the created co-creator in a very positivistic point of view while not spending nearly enough time looking at the negative aspects of human creation.⁷⁷ Gilkey says this comes from a lack of emphasis on understanding the created co-creator religiously—that is, in relation to God. Because of this, Hefner fails to stress in his model that “the most creative aspects of human being—intelligence, morals, religion; individualism and social unity; memory and foresight, and on and on—can become instruments of destruction when this fundamental relationship [with God] is askew.”⁷⁸ Thus when talking about the freedom of the created co-creator, sin must be addressed.

Within the context of relationships, sin is a free creative action that does not enable the creation of wholesome and just relationship with God, with other humans or with nature. Although Gilkey may feel that Hefner should focus more on the negative effects of the created co-creators gifts, Hefner clearly understands the risk that is involved with these gifts. He defines sin as, “that [which] arises in the activity generated by

⁷⁷ Gilkey, 307.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

those gifts with which we were endowed at our creation.”⁷⁹ Bernhard Anderson also recognizes the potential risk involved with the gifts of agency and freedom. In his discussion about the Flood, he states, “The primeval history traces the source of “violence” to creaturely freedom. This freedom manifests itself in power: power to rebel against God...[This power] is not bad in itself but is potentially creative.”⁸⁰ The risk that God takes in enabling human beings with the potential for co-creativity is also the potential for sin—the potential to create relationships contrary to the way God creates relationships.

We have explored certain understandings of freedom that arise within the created co-creator model. Within the model, freedom is perhaps best understood as a gift given to human beings that enables the creation of authentic, i.e., wholesome relationships. Freedom is the foundation for all creation. Creation is what brings into being the infinite potential of freedom. We have explored why the model suggests that free agency is more than just freedom of choice. Since the created co-creator is not a mere puppet of God, his/her agency is under his/her own control via freedom. We have also seen that freedom is a means for enabling the creation of wholesome and just relationships. But these edifying types of relationships do not always occur when one exercises free creative agency. Sin can arise out of this freedom and create painful and divisive relationships.

The created co-creator model maintains that the creation of relationships of integrity is the proper end for human creative agency. This is the way we can speak of freedom as an end. The ends are relationships of integrity in which all parties are completely free. Yet, to talk of freedom as an end is to say that the created co-creator’s

⁷⁹ Hefner, 129.

⁸⁰ Anderson, 146.

freedom is held responsible to that end. Therefore, we must now turn our attention to exploring the understanding of responsibility within the created co-creator model.

In his famous work on Christian freedom, Luther makes a clear connection between freedom and responsibility. He argues for the same inescapability of freedom that this chapter has, but he does so on the grounds of being justified by faith and not works. In this regard, "a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none."⁸¹ The Christian's freedom is not limited by any external law. Yet, if this "faith" is genuine and not blasphemous, then the Christian must realize he/she "is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."⁸² Thus, when a Christian exercises creative freedom responsibly, he/she acts in service to the needs of the neighbor. This is not a limit placed upon freedom externally, but is a natural response to one's faith. Christians are not allowed to say, "'We will take our ease and do no works and be content with faith.' [Luther] answer[s]: not so, you wicked men, not so."⁸³ So what does it mean to use our creative freedom responsibly, for the sake of the neighbor, so that we may continue creation into God's envisioned future?

⁸¹ Luther, 25.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ ibid, 33.

Chapter Four

Humans as Responsible Agents

We have so far explored the ways in which the model of the created co-creator allows for an understanding of human beings as creative agents. We have seen that this is a beneficial way to understand the role humans play within relationships. We have also seen that for this to be a co-creative agency, it is necessary for the human being to be grounded in freedom. Freedom enables creation and enables relationships to be wholesome. But we have seen that freedom also enables relationships to be destructive and divisive. Therefore, since the created co-creator model is Christian, it needs to make room for a discussion of how to use one's free creative agency responsibly.

Within philosophical discussions of responsibility, there is a distinction drawn between two different understandings of responsibility. As Gregory Mellema explains in his book on collective responsibility, "Moralists commonly distinguish between 'retrospective' and 'prospective' moral responsibility. Retrospective refers to responsibility for a state of affairs which has occurred in the past, and prospective refers to a state of affairs which has not yet occurred."⁸⁴ Retrospective responsibility seeks to discover who can be praised or blamed for outcomes of past occurrences, whereas prospective responsibility seeks to discover what future occurrences one should work toward. Since the free creative agency of the created co-creator is used to create future realities, it is correct to say that responsibility will need to be explored primarily from a prospective point of view.

⁸⁴ Gregory Mellema, "Introduction," *Collective Responsibility*, URL: <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/writings/crintro.htm> Last updated Sunday, November 4, 2001

This does not mean the created co-creator model neglects retrospective responsibility. It simply means that the understanding of how human beings are responsible for past actions is shaped by how they envision their future actions. If one assumes prospective responsibility for reconciling relationships, for instance, then he/she will be very concerned about the past events that created the need for reconciliation. "Reconciliation," states Arnold B. Come, "consists of nothing short of the restoration and fulfillment of God's original and persistent purpose for his [sic] creation."⁸⁵ Thus, if one is prospectively oriented toward restoring wholesome relationships, he/she will need to understand the "original" intent for those relationships and assume responsibility for his/her past actions that have created the present broken and discordant relationships.

The notion of reconciliation, of restoring right-relations, resonates well with the created co-creator model. In an article on holistic health and salvation, Ted Peters stresses the need to think more about salvation in terms of reconciliation: "We need to reopen discussion on the nature of salvation, especially as it concerns the relationship of the part to the whole."⁸⁶ We have seen that the created co-creator model provides some insightful ways of talking about the relationship of the part to the whole, and can be useful within the discussion of salvation and reconciliation. It may not adequately address how humans cannot save themselves, but it does show how humans can be vessels for carrying God's reconciliation to others. To see how this might be the case, we need to examine the model's understanding of prospective responsibility.

This chapter will explore the forward-looking view of responsibility within the created co-creator model in two ways. It will look to the promises God makes for

⁸⁵ Arnold B. Come, *Agents of Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 29.

⁸⁶ Ted Peters, "Wholeness in Salvation and Healing," *Lutheran Quarterly* vol. 5 (1991), 312.

creation, and then see how these promises enable humans to assume prospective responsibility for future creations. In his discussion of the Christian call to act tranformatively, Sponheim says, "we are both pushed and pulled ahead."⁸⁷ Let us now look at those things which "push" and those things that "pull" humans toward assuming prospective responsibility.

The "push" toward responsibility comes from our dependence upon God. But, unlike agency and freedom, responsibility is not a gift given to the created co-creator by God. Responsibility is a creation that is derived from the graces bestowed upon humans at creation (creative agency and freedom). Going back to the agricultural metaphor, the human being is graced with free creative agency to change the dynamics of the other givens, like the weather and the soil. In pragmatic terms, the farmer uses these graces to increase his/her crop so that it might nourish his/herself and others. So if the farmer uses free creative agency to harm the crop, or harm the others for which the crop is meant to serve, then we can say the gift of free creative agency is being used irresponsibly. The consequences of creative agency and freedom are what the created co-creator is retrospectively responsible for, but agency and freedom are also the means for assuming prospective responsibility.

Although responsibility is in part derived from theses graces, it is not a sufficient understanding of responsibility if we only speak of the "push." If indeed humans are free, then they are free to change what responsible action looks like. In this way, responsibility can be assumed by using free creative agency in whatever way an individual desires—for example, to either rid the world of all those who are different from oneself (e.g. the Holocaust) or to create wholesome and just relationships. But as

⁸⁷ Sponheim, 78.

Sponheim reminds us, the Christian view of human action is not uprooted in such a radical way. He states, "We do not merely act as objects blown by the wind or carried by a current. We *act*. We see our acts as having some significance. In that seeing we are wagering that the reality of which we are somehow a part allows us to claim significance, for acting is not in principle senseless."⁸⁸ The promises of God are what make our free agency escape this random senselessness—especially the promise that all will be reconciled and that, therefore, our actions in the here and now matter. These promises are what comprise the "pull" of our responsibility. Thus to construct an understanding of humans as responsible agents, it will be beneficial to examine the end God promises and desires.

Sponheim finds it helpful to speak of this "pull" as a calling. A promise has been pronounced and we move toward it. "What follows for the creator and creature as we move forward, called into the drama of life?" asks Sponheim. "The creature is claimed, called into responsibility."⁸⁹ This imagery of being called forward is helpful for understanding the dynamic nature of the *creatio continua* in which the created co-creator is enabled to participate.

Sponheim emphasizes the importance of the dynamic nature of the call, and therefore the dynamic nature of our responsibility. This dynamic nature of responsibility is central to our model because of the importance of relationships, which are by their nature extremely dynamic. To highlight this, Sponheim contrasts the responsibility created by a law with the responsibility created by relationships—"As God calls, stone

⁸⁸ Sponheim, 82.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 80.

tablets turn into living flesh.”⁹⁰ In other words, in calling us to be responsible within relationships, God does not call us toward static and legalistic action but toward dynamic and creative action. Before we look specifically at the dynamics of co-creative responsibility, let us look further at the nature of the end to which God calls us.

Within Hefner’s exploration of the created co-creator’s responsibility, the end plays an important role for understanding how to use free creative agency. He claims that humans are responsible for using their free creative agency “to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us.”⁹¹ Thus, we see the way in which the created co-creator model provides an understanding of Berdyaev’s second use of freedom—as an end. The aim of our free creative agency is to create wholesome, and therefore free, relationships with all of creation.

Berdyaev reminds us that a view of the end in terms of creativity cannot be teleological. The end cannot be seen as something permanent and final in a static and non-creative fashion. “The teleological point of view enslaves man [sic] as a creative being.”⁹² If freedom is the end for human activity, then we cannot expect that humans will stop exercising the creativity contained within that freedom. The creative nature of the human being and of God, which the created co-creator model embraces, would be stifled if the promised end does not allow for a dynamic and transformative continuation of creation. In this sense, “It is no mistake to imagine that creativeness leads to bad infinity. Creative activity may bring us into eternity, and eternity may be creative and dynamic.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Hefner, 27.

⁹² Berdyaev, *Destiny Of Man*, 44.

⁹³ Ibid.

A relational understanding of God and creation also supports this dynamic end. Because relationships played such a big role for Luther's understanding of reality, he also rejects the idea of a final consummation of our lives (at least on this earth): "Our life is one of beginning and of growth, not one of consummation."⁹⁴ Relationships are never final; they are always in a state of becoming. Therefore the co-creation of those relationships is always a process of continuous, dynamic creation.

For Hefner, the means that achieves this wholesome future is altruism—a term he identifies with the Christian concept of *agape*:

I felt that a religious tradition that centers on a man dying on a cross for the benefit of the whole world could not responsibly ignore...the possibility of living viably so as to put the welfare of others so high on the agenda that one creature would put its own welfare in jeopardy for the sake of others.⁹⁵

Thus, within the model, the human co-creator is responsible for the creation of wholesome and just relationships that are firmly rooted in altruistic love. Hefner assigns this responsibility to the created co-creator because of God's intended purposes for creation. It may be true that God's initial aim for creation was to establish wholesome relationships built on love, but this does not necessarily generate creaturely responsibility. We have shown that just because we are pushed down an initial path does not mean that we must follow it. We are free to regard God's initial aims however we want, if they are indeed only initial aims. What makes us responsible to them is the promise God has given that these aims will come to fruition. We are called or pulled by these eschatological promises to be responsible for the creation of Godly relationships. Because we are assured that the reality of the world is built upon love, unity and justice;

⁹⁴ Taken from his writings on 2 Cor. 3:18. Source found in Sponheim, 75.

⁹⁵ Hefner, 191.

and that relationships in accord with this reality will be fruitful, we are enabled to use are free creative agency responsibly.

Yet how can we be sure that reality is founded upon the principle of altruism? Is the created co-creator model's view of reality beneficial in this regard? It is quite apparent that altruism is not a pervasive characteristic of human action. Langdon Gilkey critiques Hefner in this way: "In regard to the role of culture in altruism, I would argue that our past and present behavior in social history is almost as contrary as it conceivably could be to altruism."⁹⁶ Thus, it can just as easily be argued that Nietzsche was right and reality is founded on the will to power and not *agape*. God initially gave humans the gift of freedom and agency to create, so why should humans not exercise these gifts in whatever way possible? Why is Christianity not a mere subversion of the values of reality? The answer can only come through a view from the end.

To gain a better understanding of the created co-creator's view of the end, it will again be helpful to consider the model from Nicholas Berdyaev's perspective. E.L. Allen tells us Berdyaev's understanding of the goal of human co-creatorship. He states,

The goal is not the salvation of the soul, that would be a low and unworthy aim. Nor is it merely the creation of a just human order...for that would be to leave out of account both the past generations...and the whole realm of nature to which man [sic] is so closely bound. We must work for nothing less than the transfiguration of the world...the lifting up of man and nature to share in the very life of God.⁹⁷

This "to share in the very life of God" may seem like a very radical end for human creative agency, especially to Western ears not acquainted with the concept of theosis—"deification" or "ingodding": "God became human, that we might become god."⁹⁸ But it

⁹⁶ Gilkey, 300.

⁹⁷ Allen, 23.

⁹⁸ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 4, s.v. "Eastern Christianity."

is merely just affirming the goal of wholesome relationships if we keep in mind Kierkegaard's insistence that we are to be "infinitely interested in the reality of another."⁹⁹ Wholesome relationships are centered on the sharing of oneself because he/she desperately desires to share in the life of the other. Jesus stresses this notion in his paraphrase of the Genesis account of marriage when he says in Mark 10:8, "and the two shall become one flesh." The creation of one new identity out of two old identities is the goal of relationships and is the most profound sense of participating in the life of an other. Thus, within the context of relationships, the goal of our free creative agency is to enable the creation of a wholesome relationship with God that lets us share in God's reality.

Still, we must ask: What is the very life of God toward which our creative agency seeks to participate? Or, we can also approach this question from the model of *imago dei* that says, "If humankind is to carry out the task of dominion...on the earth, then the exercise of human dominion should imitate God's own dominion over creation, and should have as its goal the fulfillment of God's good purpose for creation."¹⁰⁰ This idea of dominion that comes from *imago dei* may be a helpful way of exploring what we mean by sharing in God's life. The word dominion is quite controversial and carries heavy connotations. It carries with it patriarchal connotations of a king's dominion over his subjects. This is further enhanced by the etymological relation it has to the word 'dominate.' If we approach the human call to exercise dominion from an understanding of God's rule as a king in sole power, then we will not have a responsibility that is compatible with the created co-creator model. As has been shown, the model

⁹⁹ Kierkegaard, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the 'Philosophical Fragments,'" 228.

¹⁰⁰ Wilfong, 46.

necessitates that God not be an all-controlling, authoritarian figure. We must find an understanding of God's rule that would account for a God that shares power in a co-creative relationship and that does not exercise dominion as dominance over the other. And we must also find an understanding of God's rule that would account for God being most clearly seen hanging dead on a cross.

In an effort to see how the created co-creator model answers these questions about God's reign, let us now examine Hefner's claim that altruistic love is the reality of God in which humans are called to share. Perhaps it will be helpful to explore the factors that ground the Judeo-Christian understanding of reality in love and altruism. A central principle to the Judeo-Christian understanding of God is that God assumes responsibility for God's creation. This claim is upheld by the covenant and in the person of Jesus Christ.

Creatio ex nihilo also gives insight into the way God assumes responsibility. God's radical freedom within *creatio ex nihilo* means that God is not responsible to anything. God is not responsible for maintaining a certain relationship with the creation, nor is God responsible for maintaining any relationship with the creation. Yet, God has freely chosen to assume responsibility for what God created and to be in relation with that creation in a certain way. The ancient Israelites were assured that God had assumed responsibility because of the promise of the covenant—"God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth'" (Genesis 9:17). In the covenant, God makes known that God has assumed the responsibility of being committed to creation.

The end which God desires for humans to achieve within this covenant is

recorded in Leviticus 19:2—"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." This command also echoes the claim in Genesis that "God created humankind in his image" (1:27). Leviticus 19 goes on to explain the chief ways that humans can use their agency to become holy and godly through moral and ritual action—including the famous phrase, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). Thus, we see that the way humans can create a godly relationship is to ground it in love.

Jesus of Nazareth quoted these words some time later. When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). Thus, once again, we see that God's commandment is to create relationships built on love. But what exactly does a relationship built on love look like? Berdyaev provides an interesting answer to this question. He claims, "The true purpose and meaning of love is not to help our neighbors, do good works, cultivate virtues which elevate the soul, or attain perfection, but to reach the union of souls, fellowship and brotherhood [sic]."¹⁰¹ In this statement, it is clear that love is seen as that which unites. Unity is the ultimate goal of relationship. To be "infinitely interested in the reality of another" is to desire to be united with that other. Love is what makes that unity and fellowship possible.

But it is not obvious at first how *agape* can be understood in terms of creation. Love is certainly not seen as a creation within the Christian tradition. It is pure grace—"we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Although we cannot create love, we are able to respond to love with love. *Agape* is the medium through which we can co-create relationships of unity, yet humanity is dependent upon the work of God through

¹⁰¹ Berdyaev, *Destiny Of Man*, 187.

Jesus Christ to empower us with such love for creation.

The command to be holy by loving means that “human beings are called to responsibility: to exercise dominion within the rule of God.”¹⁰² The rule of God that is seen in the life and death of Jesus is the rule of *agape*. Douglas John Hall argues that Jesus’ death reveals just how much he loved life and the relationships he was in—“Jesus’ death is motivated by his quest for life, the life of those with whom he has made common cause.”¹⁰³ It is love that is so interested in the other, so concerned that the relationship is free that it risks itself for the other. Sponheim insists that we must understand that “God’s servant form [Jesus] was not a disguise.”¹⁰⁴ God’s reign through humble service to the other is genuine and authentic. Because of the gift of *agape* and the promise that God has made in the life and death of Jesus, the created co-creator has a hope that his/her creativity can be used to participate in the life of God. This hope and the goals are what define the created co-creator’s responsibility.

It is crucial to discuss Jesus as the proof of a created co-creator’s responsibility via *agape*. Jesus is God’s way of assuming responsibility for God’s creation and Jesus is the way in which humans can assume their responsibility for creation. Sponheim makes this clear within his understanding of God’s creativity when he says that “In Christ, we have more than an indication of the human role in the relationship; we have an empowering for that role.”¹⁰⁵ The life of service led by Jesus is what can empower the created co-creator to also assume the responsibility of service. This notion of empowerment provides a good transition as we move to our discussion of how God’s

¹⁰² Anderson, 149.

¹⁰³ Hall, 198.

¹⁰⁴ Sponheim, 100.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 101.

assumed responsibility enables humans to be responsible in a similar manner.

As we have seen, Luther insists that part of the empowerment that comes from Jesus Christ is the empowerment to use one's freedom to become "a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹⁰⁶ Thus, we are called to assume responsibility by meeting the needs of the neighbor. We must act in a way that creates an environment that enables the neighbor's needs to be fulfilled. The specific shape this responsibility takes is always in flux, always dynamic, as it seeks to creatively address the unique needs of different individuals.

Gustaf Wingren, in his work on Luther's sense of vocation, emphasizes that we must not think that our calling from God is somehow disconnected from the call of our neighbor. He states,

Uncertainty as to whether one is called is often due to regarding oneself as an isolated individual, whose "call" must come in some inward manner. But in reality we are always bound up in relations with other people; and these relations with our neighbors actually effect our vocation.¹⁰⁷

Since we are bound within the human community, we cannot act responsibly if we do not allow the needs of our neighbor to shape the use of our creative actions. Every job we perform is in this sense a vocation because we are called by the promises of God to meet the needs of our neighbor.

To see how this notion of responsibility is applicable, let us examine a few areas of theological study in which it plays an important role. Post-Holocaust theology, where I first came in contact with the created co-creator, is one such area. The reason that the model is beneficial for this field of study is that it allows humans to assume some retroactive responsibility for the sin and violence in the world. It recognizes with

¹⁰⁶ Luther, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

Genesis that "Human beings, created to image...the rule of God in their exercise of dominion, have corrupted the earth with violence."¹⁰⁸ The reason why human beings can be held, in part, responsible for this is because of the created co-creator model's understanding of prospective responsibility. Because humans are aware that their free creative agency can be used for the creation of just and wholesome relationships, they are held accountable when their agency is used otherwise. Thus, the created co-creator model's understanding of prospective responsibility is a beneficial way for allowing humans to be held accountable for retroactive evil, but also to hold them responsible for making sure atrocities like the Holocaust never happen again.

Another way in which the prospective responsibility of the created co-creator model has been used is found within theological discussions of the current ecological crisis. One of Hefner's main points in his work is to heighten our understanding of our relationship with nature via the created co-creator model. He feels that humans must realize that "the future of the planetary community and its ecosystem depend on the further creating work of the co-creator."¹⁰⁹ Thus, the created co-creator is responsible for creating in ways that make the future wholesome for the human community as well as all of creation.

Prospective responsibility within the created co-creator model should not only be understood as that which shapes future *actions*. The prospective outlook also means that humans are responsible for how they neglect to exercise their free creative agency. This neglect of responsibility is seen within Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor." In this famous chapter we see humans neglecting their responsibility by surrendering their own free

¹⁰⁸ Anderson, 147.

¹⁰⁹ Hefner, 120.

creative agency. Because there is such risk involved with freedom, and because it is challenging to always be responsible for one's future creations, it is a natural response to try and escape it. As the Grand Inquisitor says, "Nothing is more beguiling to man than freedom of conscience, but nothing is more tormenting either."¹¹⁰ Because of the nature of freedom, humans are always free to hand over their freedom to some authority. Yet they can never escape being free and never escape being in some way responsible for the consequences of their non-actions.

This story also shows that humans often do not value their own freedom in relationships as much as God does. We must remember that the love command says to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we do not value our own freedom in a relationship, then we clearly do not love ourselves. Using our free creative agency responsibly means creating relationships that value the freedom of the other so highly because the individual values his/her own freedom so highly. In fact, *agape* is based on the paradox that an individual can value this freedom so highly that he/she is willing to limit his/her own freedom for the sake of the other.

We have seen that the created co-creator model provides a prospective understanding of responsibility. This responsibility is shaped by the creative responsibility that God assumes. God's responsibility for God's creation is best seen within this model as actions done in *agape* that enable the creation of relationships of integrity. The use of *agape* means that God's dominion is best understood as a dominion of service—as exemplified in the life and death of Jesus. The created co-creator is responsible to exercise his/her free creative agency in a similar manner of service.

¹¹⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. Ignat Avsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 319.

Because we are called to serve our neighbors, our responsibility is dynamic. We must create the dynamics of a loving relationship so that both our neighbor and ourselves are able to participate in the transformative work of God.

We have seen that the promises God makes through Jesus Christ serve an important role in shaping how we are to use our prospective creative agency responsibly. These promises "serve to remind us that even before we begin our redemptive tasks, something decisive has already been accomplished by God in relation to this work, and that what has been done provides the framework, sets the tone, and indicates certain characteristics and limits to our own activity."¹¹¹ Our neighbor defines the limits. *Agape* defines the tone. And these promises give us the hope that our activity is not in vain.

¹¹¹ George M. Landes, "Creation and Liberation," *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 147.

Conclusions

The “created co-creator” is an image that discloses many understandings of what it means for humans to be free and responsible creative agents. We have explored the created co-creator model to gain a certain understanding of reality within the Christian tradition. In doing so, we have referred to images and concepts from other points of view to see the similarities and differences that they share with our model.

We have seen that the primary doctrine that Christians use to understand God’s initial creative agency, *creatio ex nihilo*, illuminates the understanding of human creative agency within the created co-creator model. Both *creatio ex nihilo* and the created co-creator entail an understanding of the human being and all of creation as dependent on God; both help explain the importance of relationships within the discussion of creation; and both provide an understanding of the importance of freedom and responsibility within the discussion of creation.

We have also brought the created co-creator model into dialogue with the biblical story of creation found in Genesis 1-11. This has illuminated the understanding of a creation that is good at its foundation. It undergirds the model’s understanding that God is not all-controlling, but instead shares creative power and is affected by human creations. We saw that this is important for the creation of authentic and wholesome relationships. The biblical creation story also helps explain the corruption that arises out of human creation due to the misuse of certain God-given gifts. And the covenant God establishes with all of creation (Genesis 9) shows how God assumes responsibility analogous to the responsibility to which a created co-creator is called.

In Chapter Three, we gained a better understanding of the created co-creator

model's notion of freedom by exploring it in relation to Christian existentialist conceptions of freedom. This aided us in seeing freedom within the created co-creator model as more than just freedom of choice. Indeed, freedom is a broad state of grace that serves as the foundation for creativity. This too aided in our understanding of authentic and wholesome relationships. We saw that freedom must be upheld to the fullest within relationships if they are to be just and constructive.

Another concept that helped us in our exploration was the nature of sin. The created co-creator model does not use the traditional Western notion of sin that speaks of nature being totally depraved. Instead it contains a more Eastern view of sin, where freedom is emphasized as the gift of creation that enables sin. Of course, more work could have been done to see how the created co-creator model deals with the effects sin on the creative process, and how creative options are limited by the context of sin. But, given the scope of this paper, that would not have been possible.

I have come to understand through writing this paper that my exploration of the created co-creator model in relation to other theological concepts and models will be an ongoing process. It would be interesting to see how the understanding of free and responsible creative agency found in this paper could aid me in these future explorations. I briefly used some christological and eschatological concepts to help in the understanding of how God assumes responsibility for creation and how this gives rise to hope. The created co-creator model is very beneficial for understanding the humanity of Jesus. But it would be interesting to explore more fully how the divinity of Jesus and an eschatological understanding of salvation would fit into this model.

I also briefly touched upon the work of Trinitarian models of God that illuminate

God's role in relationships. It would be interesting to explore our model further in light of these Trinitarian concepts. The discussion of relationships within the understanding of the immanent Trinity would be interesting to examine in relation to the created co-creator's sense of relationships. It would also be important to know what creative role the Holy Spirit plays within our model. And in thinking about Elizabeth A. Johnson's work, I also wonder how the created co-creator model would work with other understandings within feminist theology.

I briefly mentioned that the created co-creator has been important for rethinking understandings of *imago dei* and the sense of "dominion" humans are to have with creation. But it would be beneficial to explore this further and see if there are places where the notion of a created co-creator might fall short of encompassing a full understanding of *imago dei*.

I would also be very interested to explore further how free and responsible creative agency relates with concepts found in liberation theology. It seems that the notion of empowerment that was touched upon within the last chapter, as well as the model's understanding of creative agency would have many implications within the field of liberation theology. Along these same lines, I am intrigued by the correlation within my own life between creativity and despair. I feel the model might be able to shed some light on why there is a prompting of a creative response within the dark nights of the soul.

I hope that the work done in this paper will aid me in my future explorations of these various other theological concepts and models. After all, the concept of free and responsible creative agency discussed in this paper has implications for many aspects of life. The questions, who am I? and What am I to do to effect change in the world? will

always prod my future theological explorations. But the heightened awareness I now have of how my free creative actions can be used responsibly to enable the creation of wholesome and just relationships will play a central role in shaping my future understandings of my relationships with God, with humanity, and with the rest of creation.

I have a deeper awareness that I am dependent upon the graces of creative agency and freedom to do this co-creative task. Yet, being the flawed creature I am, I also realize there are many more graces that I need in order to fully assume this task. My ability to envision a future non-existent reality and act upon that vision gives me a way to move beyond the paralyzing feeling of helplessness within this world. This paper has shown me the need to make sure my creative vision is also the vision of God. I know, however, this is not an easy task. Therefore, may God grant us the strength and courage to effect an empowering change upon this world. As Gandhi's famous quote reminds us, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world"—change that participates in the wholesome communion of God, humanity, and creation.

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