

Geert Roskam, Joseph Verheyden, eds., *Light on Creation. Ancient Commentators in Dialogue and Debate on the Origin of the World*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017, 314 p., ISBN 978-3-16-154314-2.*

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The volume *Light on Creation* is the result of the international colloquium with the same title, held on 4–6 February 2015, at the Arts Faculty of the KU Leuven and is edited by professors Geert Roskam and Joseph Verheyden at KU Leuven. The conference was part of the research project *From Chaos to Order. The Creation of the World. New Views on the Reception of Platonic Cosmogony in Later Greek Thought, Pagan and Christian*. The book brings together papers of late ancient philosophy and early Christian studies, and it provides analyses on the debates surrounding the concept of creation among ancient commentators. Three sections make up the content of the book, covering *the Middle and Neoplatonic Tradition*, some texts of *the Christian Tradition* and a third part dedicated to *Some Other Voices*.

The first section opens with Mauro Bonazzi's article *Middle Platonists on the Eternity of the Universe*, addressing the question of the eternity of the universe. The author discusses early imperial Platonism which attributed an eternalist thesis to Plato, according to which the universe has to be regarded as eternal with no beginning in time. Unlike the Hellenistic perception, that Plato considered the universe as created, the early imperial perspective seeks to prove that the world was ungenerated. Bonazzi reviews some of the arguments from the old Platonists and early imperial Platonists on the first part of the article, and addresses possible influences that this shift may owe to influences from other philosophical schools.

Sarah Klitenic Wear, in *The Position and Function of the Demiurge in Syrianus's Cosmos*, comparatively discusses the conception that Syrianus had on the position and function of the Demiurge. Placed at the limit between the intellectual realm, and within the first intellectual triad Kronos-Rhea- Zeus, Syrianus' Demiurge is the actual agent of creation, making possible, through his intermediate position, the motion of becoming – as part of the triad he makes up with Life and Being. The Soul imitates the activity of the Demiurge: it remains, proceeds and returns (p.27).

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Syrianus' concept of Demiurge is as an entity "firmly" of the noetic world. Proclus "offers gentle corrections" and develops on Syrianus' idea presenting a Demiurge with creative role.

An exercise of textual criticism virtuosity is offered in the study of Lorenzo Ferroni, who argues for the necessity of a new edition of Proclus' *in Timaeum*. He offers a rich analysis of Proclus' commentary on Plato's dialogue on creation, *Timaeus*. His focus is especially *in Timaeum*, II, 340.14–341. After reviewing the manuscript tradition that provided the basis for Diehl's edition, Ferroni convincingly argues for a revision of the *stemma codicum* itself, relying on the work of Mariella Menchelli and, respectively, Lidia Pera, and on the author's own work on the revised manuscript tradition. To illustrate the case more eloquently, Ferroni retakes *In Timaeum* 1.340.14–341.24, a passage discussing the φυσικὸς λόγος in the process of creation. The passage is reproduced in Diehl's edition, but with an apparatus collated by Ferroni, based on his revised *stemma codicum*.

Gerd Van Riel addresses the question of the perceptibility of an eminently Platonic world: when causes are immaterial, how can one account on the visibility and tangibility of the universe? Taking Proclus' commentary of *Timaeus*, Van Riel highlights Proclus' stance on the generation as compared to Plato's understanding, which is, as he convincingly argues, rather rudimentary. Only when matter receives qualities is matter visible and thus perceivable. "Its perceptibility (...) is not something matter has out of itself, but it is the effect of a gift of the Demiurge" (p.49).

The second part of the volume, *The Christian Tradition*, brings the focus on how the discussion developed on the Christian side. David C. DeMarco and Volker Henning Drecolli write on how Scripture is used in the homilies of Basil of Caesarea and on Basil's exegesis on heavenly spheres in the book of Genesis.

In the paper entitled *Basil of Caesarea's Exegesis of the Heavens in Homiliae in hexaemeron 3*, David C. DeMarco will settle for a final interpretation by quoting one of the letters in which Basil clearly refers to the firmament as something concave in its depth, but convex in its surface. One cannot know the exact elemental formation of the firmament, but one can know more about its role: it is where water is and meteorological phenomena take place. The firmament is one of the heavens, the second, and it separates the heaven in which *aither* resides, namely the heat that pulls upwards the earthly waters. In fact, the world will come to an end once the earthly waters are consumed as they enter the aither. The author tries to conjecture that the firmament, as presented on the third sermon of Basil's homily Hexaemeron, is very much close to our conception of

atmosphere. DeMarco pleads that Basil's exegesis tries to keep only within biblical references, in spite some possible references to pagan writings. An analytical outline of the homily is appended.

Volker Henning Drecolt analyses Basil's Homilies in *Hexaemeron* to show not only Basil's exegesis, but how is this exegesis placed within a homiletical scope, namely at the edification of Basil's audience. The study brings about argumentation of Basil's use of biblical quotation (a - from outside the book of Genesis, to show how it is used, b - the proof from the custom of the biblical language, often based on the arrangement of biblical verses that are linked to each other, c - an illustrative use of biblical passages). Basil rejects allegorical reading, proceeding with the conviction that in Scripture the sense of the words is visible to all. Not only does he refute allegorical readings, but he also rejects the use of science and philosophy, because like this the Scripture's meaning will not be followed, but the Scripture will be used to illustrate an external meaning. The key to understanding Scripture is the convention with Scripture. Where the meaning seems to be hiding, one encounters, actually, a special pedagogy of God: the aim of the silence of meaning is to initiate and enhance a desire for knowledge, a desire for God. Moreover, the effort in understanding will render the eventually understood contents into a mere valuable asset. Basil's special exegesis therefore usually starts from philological or lexical peculiarities, following them in their other occurrences elsewhere in the Scripture and, as a third step, by looking for a broad context to be taken for the Scripture as well. A deeper sense will always be for moral edification.

Samuel Pomeroy presents the theological and literal context of John Chrysostom teaching on the creation of man in his homilies on the *Genesis*. He makes an elaborate plea for considering the rabbinic roots for John Chrysostom's exegetical sources. Linguistic and grammatical elements trace back some of his ideas of Eusebius of Emesa. Proposing to address commentaries beyond the classical distinctions between allegorical versus literal, the author takes Chrysostom's method as a complex compound. The article tries to identify the channels of interpretation that have sourced Chrysostom's view on interpreting Gen 1:26 and how he worked on such interpretational traditions in his theological views, in this respect trinitarian conceptions. Chrysostom's interpretational principles are: grammatical biblical interpretation, liturgical communal setting, and contemplation of the divine power. As genre, at times it is indebted to *questions et responsiones*, a pagan genre that influenced homiletics and

commentaries. Even before the commentary of Basil of Caesarea, there is a tradition (Ephrem the Syrian, Eusebius, Athanasius) who pleaded for the fact that God was actually speaking to his Son, mentioning that this comes against what the “Jews” were saying. Chrysostom’s Jews seem to represent both a reference to Jewish exegetes, and neo-Arian exegetes. His conjecturing, based on common textual elements, that Chrysostom did not derive the problem from his immediate circle, but came through Eusebius of Emesa. None of the authors he may have had access to, does not endorse, the author argues, for the knowledge Chrysostom seems to have of Jewish exegesis. Pomeroy advances the hypothesis that he was familiar to some degree to at least parts of the Targum Ps. –Jonathan *ad Genesim*. Probably, there was, “an avenue of communication between Jewish and Christian Exegetical circles.” (p.125)

David L. Dusenbury in his article *Judaic authority in Nemesius on Emessa’s De natura hominis* (390 CE) proposes to survey Nemesius’ use of authoritative Judaic material, focusing on the origin of the world with instruments from Hellenistic philosophy. He analyses the Jewish elements in Scripture in Nemesius of Emesa’s work on the creation of humankind. The author makes an elaborate plea for considering the rabbinic roots for John Chrysostom’s exegetical sources. Linguistic and grammatical elements trace back some of his ideas to Eusebius of Emesa. Proposing to address commentaries beyond the classical distinctions between allegorical versus literal, the author takes Chrysostom’s method as a complex compound. The author attempts to identify the channels of interpretation that have sourced Chrysostom’s view on interpreting Gen 1:26 and how he worked on such interpretational traditions in his theological views, in this respect trinitarian conceptions. Chrysostom’s interpretational principles: grammatical biblical interpretation, liturgical communal setting, and contemplation of the divine power.

Benjamin Gleede presents a paper entitled *Christian apologetics or Confessional Polemics, Context and Motivation of Philoponus De opificio mundi*. He attempts an approach to John of Alexandria, who begun as a commentator of Aristotle, faithful also to Ammonius, his Neoplatonic teacher, so that, after 529, he refutes them. Disapproving the exegetical method debunking the arguments for harmonizing Plato and Aristotle considering the matter of the eternity of the world, later he departs from the Aristotelic main cosmological ideas so that, after 20 years, he writes the *Arbiter*, a fundamental Christological work.

Paul M. Blowers writes *From Nonbeing to Eternal Well-Being, Creation ex nihilo in the cosmology and Soteriology of Maximus the Confessor*, in which he emphasizes Maximus' dependence on various interpretations on creation *ex nihilo* in his cosmology and soteriology, proving the importance of *mythos* and *logos*. Christ, the Logos leads all things from non being to being, in the transition from "being" to "well-being" to "eternal wellbeing" which is the revelation of a new creation. (p.185).

Clement Kueh proposes an analysis of Anastasius Sinaita's *Hexaemeron* by paralleling, with an interesting case, his commentary to the Genesis with Homer's *Odyssey*. Anastasius' interpretation is typological as he understands the creation of the world as a model for its recreation. Anastasius places Christ in an epic populated by strange creatures, traveling at sea, battling enemies and reaching foreign lands so as to rescue his lady, the Church, within an interpretational *superstructure* and identifying Homeric hues, treating the *Hexaemeron* as an epic commentary. A notable difference is that it is not Christ travelling the seas, but Anastasius himself.

Dimitrios Zaganas, in *The Debate on Gen 1:1–3 According to Anastasius Sinaita's Hexaemeron*, exemplifies the manner in which Anastasius of Sinai discusses diverse types of ancient commentaries. Zaganas points also on the tensions between Christian and Greek philosophers. The discussion of the elements – heaven and earth, light and fire, darkness and light – is particularly significant and important in Anastasius arguments against the Miaphysite.

The last section *Some other voices* offers articles by Gregory E. Sterling, Caludio Moreschini and Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, with consistent contributions that counterparts the core of the volume with some apparent *marginalia* voices.

Gregory E. Sterling, "*The Most Perfect Work*": *The Role of Matter in Philo of Alexandria* focuses on very specific concepts, "passive cause" and matter in the writings of Philo. The author chooses the *De opificio Mundi* as it analyses both the Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*. Sterling rightly points out that Philo seems to be committed to both views: in *De opificio mundi* it seems that he agrees that the matter is eternal, while in *De providentia* he seems to agree with *creatio aeterna*. Through these, Philo consciously becomes a bridge between Hellenistic philosophers and early Christians.

In the article *Calcidius between Creatio Ex Nihilo and Platonism* Claudio Moreschini analyses the manner in which the *creatio ex nihilo*, a Christian concept, developed at the encounter with Platonic cosmology.

He points that Calcidian doctrines preserves Cristian elements, as well as non-Christian aspects that can be traced back to early phases of Christianity and could prove his acquaintance with Philo and Origen.

Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, in *Gnostic Views on the Origin and the Nature of the Universe*, reinforces the idea that gnostic mythological cosmology should be linked with Greek and Roman philosophical and religious traditions. The focus is on the *Secret Book (Apocryphon) of John*, which comprises “one of the most comprehensive accounts of the ancient Gnostic myth of origins” (p. 278). The first part of the paper restates that the difference between the entirely supreme God and the demiurgic, cosmic (demonic) being, “Yaldabaoth”, has obviously four Greek philosophical pedigrees. These are: *Theological dualism* (with the roots in the *Timaeus* and Aristotle’s idea that the supreme God cannot be the *causa efficiens* of motions and changes in the physical world); *Anthropology* (the Platonist thought that the “innermost core of the human being was not created”), correlated with this is *the principle “like knows like”* (which allows to have *gnosis* of the transcendent God), and finally, the Aristotelian thesis that the *nous* in man is “actualized” through contact with the always actual divine. *Nous* made the Gnostics to believe that the humans have *Contacts with the divine*. The second part of the paper provides an overview of the *Secret Book* and explains the rise of “imperfection from perfection”. The focus is on Sophia, who, “deluded by psychic impulses”, conceived a thought and exteriorized it. She conceived a “son” without her male consort (which, according to Aristotle, should provide “the form”, fn. 24), a “son” condemned to be deficient and imperfect. This “son”, Yaldabaoth, becomes the Chief Ruler of the cosmic world, and echoes the Old Testament God’s “inferior qualities” such as: jealousy, ignorance or arrogance (p. 283). The third part of the article shows that the *psychic body* of man was created by Yaldabaoth. Even if Luttikhuizen parallels the gnostic myth of creation with Talmudic making of golem (fn. 40), he insists in the fourth part of the paper that the root of the Gnostic myth of origins should be found in the Greek philosophical ideas.

For those interested in philosophy, theology, and ancient thought, the book *Light on Creation* is an essential read. It provides valuable insights into recent developments and tendencies in ancient scholarship. The volume provides a very useful index of *Modern Authors*, of *Ancient Texts and Authors*, and of *Biblical References*. A list with the contributors would have been also suitable.