**Creation Myth Overview**

The document explores the concept of creation myths, their characteristics, significance, and various classifications across different cultures and religions.

**Definition and Importance of Creation Myths**

Creation myths are symbolic narratives that explain how the world and humanity came into existence, often regarded as sacred accounts within various cultures. ​ They convey profound truths and reflect the worldview and self-identity of the societies that share them. ​

* Creation myths are found in nearly all known religious traditions. ​
* They often feature deities, human-like figures, or animals as characters. ​
* These myths are typically set in a vague past, referred to as "in illo tempore." ​
* They address significant questions about existence and humanity's place in the universe.
* Creation myths are primarily oral traditions, leading to multiple versions across cultures. ​

**Common Features and Functions of Creation Myths**

Creation myths share several characteristics and serve important societal roles, often explaining the unknown and teaching lessons. ​ They help define a culture's worldview and guide human relationships with nature and each other. ​

* They are considered sacred and convey cultural truths.
* Myths often explain the origins of the cosmos and humanity. ​
* They provide a framework for understanding the natural and spiritual worlds. ​
* Creation myths can be seen as a philosophy of life expressed through symbols. ​
* They help orient individuals within their cultural context. ​

**Classification of Creation Myths**

Various schemes classify creation myths based on recurring motifs and themes, highlighting the diversity of narratives across cultures. ​ Notable classifications include types such as creation ex nihilo, earth-diver, emergence, and dismemberment myths. ​

* Eliade and Long identified five basic types of creation myths. ​
* Types include creation ex nihilo, earth-diver, emergence, dismemberment, and chaos ordering.
* Marta Weigle expanded the classification to nine themes, including creation by two deities and creation from sacrifice. ​
* Raymond Van Over proposed six recurring narrative themes, such as the primeval abyss and originator deity. ​

**Ex Nihilo and Creation from Chaos**

The concept of creation ex nihilo, or creation from nothing, is central to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while creation from chaos involves bringing order from a formless void. ​ Both concepts illustrate different approaches to understanding the origins of the universe.

* Ex nihilo creation is a fundamental tenet in major monotheistic religions.
* The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly mention creation ex nihilo. ​
* Creation from chaos myths describe a formless expanse that contains the material for creation. ​
* Chaos is often associated with evil, contrasting with the order of the cosmos. ​

**World Parent Myths and Their Variations**

World parent myths describe the creation of the world through the separation or dismemberment of a primeval entity, often representing the duality of sky and earth. ​ These myths emphasize the animistic nature of creation and the sacredness of the natural world. ​

* Two forms of world parent myths exist: separation of two parents and creation from dismemberment.
* The primeval state is often depicted as an eternal union of male and female entities. ​
* Dismemberment myths transform body parts into elements of the world, such as sky and earth. ​
* Examples include Norse mythology and Maori creation stories. ​

**Emergence Myths and Their Characteristics**

Emergence myths depict humanity's journey from another world into the current one, often likened to a birth process. ​ These narratives frequently emphasize female deities and are common in Native American cultures. ​

* Emergence myths describe a staged ascent from previous worlds to the present. ​
* The process is often compared to gestation or germination. ​
* Female deities typically play a significant role in these narratives. ​
* These myths often link to migration stories of the people. ​

**Earth-Diver Myths and Their Distribution**

Earth-diver myths feature a character that retrieves material from primordial waters to create land, highlighting the theme of creation emerging from depths. ​ This motif is prevalent among various indigenous cultures, particularly in North America. ​

* The earth-diver is often an animal sent by a creator to fetch mud or sand. ​
* Common in Native American folklore, especially among tribes like the Iroquois and Cherokee.
* The motif is also found in Eastern European and some West African traditions.
* These myths often involve failed attempts to create land before success is achieved. ​