



The Beginning of Creation and Man's Fall from Grace

The Creation of Adam



➤ Michelangelo

Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* is a **fresco** painting, the fourth in a series on panels depicting scenes from the Book of Genesis, which forms a portion of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Without exaggerating, it can be said that it is the most recognized painting in the entire world.

As you can see, the painting illustrates God—portrayed as an elderly man with a white beard—giving life to Adam. It is meant to depict the creation of the first man described in the Book of Genesis. You probably remember from earlier religion courses that there are two creation accounts in the Book of Genesis.

In the first account (Gn 1:1–2:3), on the sixth day of creation “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

In the second creation account (Gn 2:4–25), God created man first and later “built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman” (Gn 2:22).

So, which one (or both) of the creation accounts did Michelangelo base his painting on? As a first clue, take a look at the people surrounding God. Note also that the shape behind the figure of God overlays the shape of a human brain. This was pointed out in 1990 by Dr. Frank Meshberger of Anderson, Indiana. The borders match with the frontal lobe, optic chiasm, brainstem, pituitary gland, and the major sulci of the cerebrum. Another theory is that the right side of the painting is a portrayal of the birth process, with the hypothesis that the red cloth around God has the shape of a human uterus. Adam is resting on what looks like a rock, which ancient art often portrays as a mother giving birth.

Also, do you notice the extra rib on his left side? (This could be the clearest clue as to which Genesis creation account Michelangelo was most concretely referring.) Michelangelo was obviously adept at many facets of painting, but he was particularly skilled at drawing the male abdomen.

So which Genesis creation account did Michelangelo likely base *Creation of Adam* on? The first account! In this account Adam and Eve were created at the same time. There is no mention in this account of Eve being created using the rib of Adam.

fresco A type of mural painting where the mural becomes part of a wall. The technique applies paint to wet plaster so that the paint is in the plaster and not on the plaster.



Focus Question

What are some religious lessons about God's creation from the Book of Genesis?

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God Made Humans Male and Female

Introduction

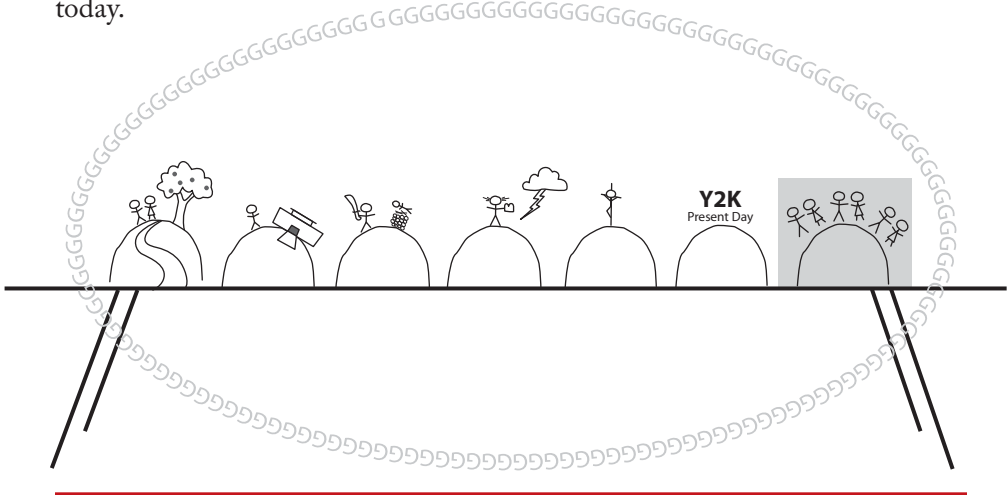
CREATION AND THE CREATOR



What do you think about this simple sketch as representative of God and his creation?

Notice that “creation” itself is contained on the long table. Do you see the beginning of life, including Adam and Eve, at the left end of the table? Can you spot anyone else you know from the Bible? Noah? Abraham? Moses? King David?

The history of God’s people, which is known as **salvation history**, is not drawn to exact scale. But it is believed that Jesus (see the manger?) came into the world about 1,900 years after Abraham. If so, that would mean that Jesus walked the earth at nearly the midpoint between Abraham and our times today.



salvation history The story of God’s saving actions in human history. Salvation history begins with the creation of Adam. Christ is at the center of salvation history. All of salvation history leads to Christ and the redemptive action of his Paschal Mystery.

The future of salvation history is indicated by a gray shading over the people hopefully still to be born. If we acknowledge that our world had a beginning at the left side of the table, we must acknowledge that it will have an end, too. It is impossible to name a major world religion—and certainly not Christianity—that would hold that planet Earth is limitless. Certainly, scientific belief would agree that the planet we live on will have an end at some point in the future.

Let's get back to what Catholics believe about this depiction of creation, salvation history, and the end of the world. Where is God on this sketch? You probably figured out that all of the *G*'s surrounding the salvation history table are meant to indicate God's presence. This corresponds with the understanding that God is *omnipresent*, that is, that he has no space limitations. God is everywhere.



Beliefs and Attributes of God

Before you go too far in placing a lot of weight on how accurately the sketch really depicts what Catholics believe about God, creation, and salvation history, let's review some central beliefs that Catholics profess about God:

- There is one God.
- God is Creator, not created.

- God is almighty.
- God is Trinitarian.

Also, you have previously learned about these attributes of God:

- God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. To put it another way, God always was, always is, and always will be.
- God is unique. He is the designer of a one-and-only world. Even the people he creates are unique.
- God is infinite and omnipotent. He has no limits. He has supreme power and authority over all his creation. God creates out of nothing.

Now let's return to thinking about the sketch. Consider some of these questions and answers in relationship to God, creation, and salvation history.

Who Created God?

Another way to ask this question is “Who caused God?” Things that we perceive in our world to exist—including time and space—do appear to us to have had a beginning. Those things need a cause to explain their origins, but this is not true if something exists outside of time and space, as God does. Asking the question “Who created God?” really doesn't make much sense, as God lives apart from time and space.

What Does It Mean to Say God Is Eternal?

By definition, something that is eternal lasts forever. We have a hard time naming an example of something on earth that is eternal. Even the oldest natural landmarks like oceans, mountains, and trees did not always exist on this planet. Yet we say that God is eternal; that is, he has no beginning and no end. To put it another way, God always was, always is, and always will be.

It definitely is hard to understand how God is eternal when we try to place him in a container of time and space. Remember that if God had not created time and space, it would not exist. God is eternal in that he is *outside* of time and space. All things are present to God as if they were happening now.

This is hard for humans to understand. Maybe this image will help: Think about a trail of ants on their way to a popsicle that is melting on the sidewalk. Some of the ants are eagerly enjoying the treat. Other ants are many feet away, at the beginning of their journey to get there. You might describe the journey



The Pyramid of Djoser, Egypt, was constructed as a burial tomb for Pharaoh Djoser, who reigned for about twenty years and died around 2630 BC.

One of the earliest civilizations to inhabit the Italian island of Sardinia were the Ozieri. This stone structure from 4800–3500 BC is thought to be a stone pyramid that was used for animal sacrifices.

as so many miles and days in “ant time” and “ant space.” Yet you can watch the entire trail of ants all at once. From your perspective, this ant journey is all happening *now*. For God, creation and salvation history are likewise all happening now.

Stonehenge (3000–2000 BC), located on Salisbury Plain in England, is shrouded in mystery. Archeologists today are not sure of how the large stones got there. The site may have been a burial ground, but even that is uncertain.



The study of mathematics provides another example to help us understand timelessness. For example, you do not say $2 + 2$ *will be* 4 or $2 + 2$ *was* 4. You say that $2 + 2$ *is* 4 because it is so in a timeless way.¹ Understanding God's timelessness will help you to understand more about how the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ is memorialized and made present in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

What Did God Do before Creation?

This is another question that humans can't fully comprehend from their own perspective of time and space. This question is meaningless for God. Remember, there was no time and space until he created it. God was not "waiting around" for millions and millions of years before he created the world. In his famous *Confessions*, St. Augustine wrote: "You [O Lord] made that very time, and no time could pass by before you made those times. But if there was no time before heaven and earth, why do they ask what you did 'then'? There was no 'then,' where there was no time."²

Modern science essentially agrees with St. Augustine. The detection of gravitational waves in scientific experiments conducted in 2015 determined that ripples of space-time carry energy and momentum and that if space-time is part of the physical universe, then it follows that the beginning of space and time must have been at the beginning of the physical universe itself. Therefore, if the universe is about 13.8 billion years old (as determined in one version of the **Big Bang Theory**), then it is useless to ask what was happening 20 billion years



The first discovery of gravitational waves occurred in 2015. Gravitational wave astronomy has the potential to reveal entirely new insights into the most violent processes in the universe such as supernovae, gamma ray bursts, or perhaps even the Big Bang. Rainer Weiss, professor of physics emeritus at MIT, helped design the instrument that discovered gravitational waves.

Big Bang Theory The name for the most commonly cited explanation of how the world began. It states that the world began with one small particle (atom), then inflated over millions of years to form the present cosmos, and is continuing to expand today.

ago. According to scientist Stephen M. Barr, “It would be like asking what lies North of the North Pole. . . . There’s no such place as North of the North Pole. Nor is there such a time in the standard Big Bang theory as before the Big Bang.”³

Why Did God Create?

The purpose of the created world is connected with the purpose of human beings. God created us for his own glory. “The world was made for the glory of God.”⁴ Our purpose is connected to our giving glory to God, though he gains nothing by that glory we offer him. St. Irenaeus wrote: “In the beginning God formed Adam, not because he was in need of humans, but so he might have someone to receive his benefits” (*Against Heresies* 4.14.1). Even before he created time, God knew us and loved us, even though we did not yet exist. Beyond just creating us into existence, God created us to obey him and to enjoy the graces of his goodness: “This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4).

What Did God Create?

Of course, God created visible things that are perceptible to the human senses. He also created invisible things, as the Nicene Creed says: “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” At the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III articulated a truth about creation that had been held by Christians since their earliest days, and before that, by the Jewish people. The council taught that God created three types of creatures out of nothing: fully spiritual creatures such as angels, fully bodily creatures such as animals, and human beings who are both body and spirit.



Fall of the angels.

God created angels before he made humans. Angels are “surpassing in perfection all visible creatures” (CCC, 330). Angels are messengers of God’s plan—for example, the angel Gabriel who was present at the Annunciation, angels who were present to announce Christ’s birth to the shepherds, angels who were with Christ when he was tempted in the desert, and angels who were present with him in the Garden of Gethsemane, at his Resurrection, and at his Ascension. Like humans, angels have a free will and can choose to accept or reject God. Angels who reject God by their own free will are demons or devils. Satan is the prince of the demons.

Human beings are creatures that are at the same time corporeal (having a physical, material body) and spiritual (having a soul).

Each creature—pure spirit, pure body, and body and spirit—possesses its own perfection as it was made by God. Nothing in the world exists by chance. God created everything out of nothing. There were no parts or elements floating around in the period before God created time and space, which he then used for creation. All existent beings, all of nature, and history itself began at the time when God drew it out of nothingness.

The Centerpiece of Human History

Look again at the table filled to represent God’s creation from the beginning of time and space to its end. As the small sampling of questions about God and creation in this section reveal, the spiritual and natural worlds have many mysterious dimensions and so does God the Creator. If you had to put an *X* on the central event of all salvation history, where would you put it and what would it be?

This book will familiarize you with that central event of all history, the **Paschal Mystery**, that is, the Good News that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, freely suffered, died, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven to save humans from sin and give them the opportunity to be with him eternally in heaven. Like creation and God, the Paschal Mystery also has many dimensions. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights the importance of the Paschal Mystery: “The Paschal Mystery of Christ’s cross

Paschal Mystery Christ’s work of redemption, accomplished principally by his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and glorious Ascension. The mystery is commemorated and made present through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.



The Paschal Mystery as envisioned by the four evangelists.

and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the church following them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished 'once and for all' by the redemptive Death of his son Jesus Christ" (571).

This redeeming and central activity in human history is previewed from the beginning of creation, both at the creation of spiritual beings and at the creation of the first humans, named in the Book of Genesis as Adam and Eve. The story of salvation includes Adam and Eve's fall from grace, known as **Original Sin**, which ruptured their relationship with God. The story of salvation tells how God did not abandon his creation after the Original Sin. He looked for a way to redeem the world

from that point in history onward, culminating in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and the events of the Paschal Mystery.

This book focuses on telling more about the Paschal Mystery, not only how it is the center of all creation and salvation history but also why it should always be at the center of your own life. As with the mystery of God, who is beyond time and space, the Paschal Mystery likewise has a timeless character, allowing you to be fully present in these saving events from the life of Jesus.

Original Sin "The sin by which the first human beings disobeyed the commandment of God, choosing to follow their own will rather than God's will. As a consequence they lost the grace of original holiness, and became subject to the law of death; sin became universally present in world. Besides the personal sin of Adam and Eve, Original Sin describes the fallen state of human nature which affects every person born into the world, and from which Christ, the 'New Adam,' came to redeem us" (CCC, Glossary).

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. What are four central beliefs about God?
2. What does it mean to say that human beings are at the same time corporeal and spiritual?
3. How are angels and human beings alike? How are they different?

Vocabulary

4. When did *salvation history* begin?
5. Why is the *Paschal Mystery* at the center of all history?

Reflection

6. Think of and write a new analogy to explain how God is outside of time and space.

Further Study

7. Write a question you have about creation that is not included in this section. Research and write an answer.



Section 1

THE TRINITY REFLECTS GOD'S CREATION

Another question to consider is “How does God create?” As you know, there is no “how to” manual to provide us with a step-by-step process to answer this question. Our human experience tells us that we are created, thankfully, by a *loving* God. Even before creation, God loved. Creation takes place within the intimate and eternal exchange of love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The Father creates the world and gives his love to it in a way similar to how he has always loved his beloved Son. The Son, receiving the Father’s love and expressing his love in return, impresses the image of the Father’s love on all of creation.



The Father creates everything out of love through the cooperation and the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The prologue of John’s Gospel emphasizes this point:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be. (Jn 1:1–3a)

Likewise, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes, quoting the Nicene Creed, that the Holy Spirit is the “giver of life,” the “source of every good” (CCC, 291).

St. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354–430) proposed that our human intellect and will reflect the Trinity. He said we can understand the Blessed Trinity by looking at ourselves. Looking deeply within your own self, you can see the image of God the Father. Then, as you grow in self-understanding, you reflect the image of God the Son, who proceeds from the Father as his own self-understanding, or Word. The Holy Spirit is the love shared between Father and Son, witnessed in you when you return your love to God. St. Augustine further clarified that the image of the Blessed Trinity is within our memory, within our intellect’s understanding of God, and within our capacity to share his love. In summary, St. Augustine would say that we find our way to God by remembering him, understanding him, and loving him. In this way our own lives are reflections of the Blessed Trinity.⁵ The ideal human cooperation with creation is through a sharing of love between committed spouses in marriage, a man and a woman.

There Are Two Creation Accounts in Genesis

We can learn three lessons from the very first words of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (290) explains:

- 1** God, who existed throughout all of eternity, gave a beginning to all that exists outside of himself.
- 2** God alone is the Creator.
- 3** Everything that exists in heaven and on earth depends on the One who gives it being.

This passage is also the opening of an entire narrative in the Book of Genesis about creation. As previously mentioned, there are actually two separate accounts of creation recorded in Genesis 1:1–11:26. It is obvious in reading the first creation account (Gn 1:1–2:4) that the biblical authors were familiar with other creation myths that were told by pagans of that time. For example, the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* was shared often by contemporaries of the biblical authors and resembles the literary style of the first account



The Babylonian creation story Enuma Elish saved in cuneiform has similarities to the two Genesis creation accounts due to similar cultural backgrounds. For example, a female is spawned from the side of a male in both accounts. However, there are more differences than similarities. Most prominently, creation of the world in the Enuma Elish is the result of several gods, not one.

in Genesis. The inspired authors placed their own creation accounts at the beginning of the Bible to address not only the religious truth about how the world began but also how creation is ordered and good and directed to God. These Genesis accounts also address the vocations of man and woman, the first sin and its ramifications for humanity, and, finally, the hope of salvation. Like similar writings of the era, the Genesis creation accounts employ figurative and symbolic language in communicating religious truths. Remember this so that you don't interpret the words of these accounts literally; for example, you aren't required to believe that God created the world in six twenty-four-hour days or that the first people were actually named Adam and Eve.

The Genesis Creation Accounts Teach about God's Love

The lessons of God and his love for human beings are not only central to the Book of Genesis—and Genesis 1–11 in particular—but to the entire Bible. It is important to remember that the foremost intention of the biblical authors was to teach religious lessons. Sometimes people read the creation accounts looking to find a primitive scientific account of the beginning of the world. The biblical authors wrote to express something deeper. They were not so much concerned about how creation happened scientifically. In fact, the

Bible spends little time on that question since it has little to no importance for chronicling our salvation; rather, the biblical authors primarily were concerned with expressing their understanding of God and the meaning of creation. In these accounts we learn:

- God created human beings—the first named Adam and Eve—in his image and likeness (see Genesis 1:27). What does this mean? Genesis 5:3 offers a clue, explaining that Adam “begot a son in his likeness, after his image; and he named him Seth.” To be made in the “image and likeness of God” means to be a son or daughter of God. The theological term for this is **divine filiation**. It means being a child of God.⁶ Of all God’s creatures, it is human beings alone who are God’s children and “called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life” (CCC, 356).
- God made himself known to the first humans, and offered them his first **covenant**. God “invited them to intimate communion with himself and clothed them with resplendent grace and justice” (CCC, 54; cf. 374). “From their friendship with God flowed the happiness of their existence in paradise” (CCC, 384).



“God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars” (Gn 1:16).

divine filiation Refers to Christ being the only begotten Son of God the Father. “Divine” refers to God. “Filiation” refers to being designated the son or daughter of a particular parent. Christ is the only begotten Son of God by nature. When Christians are baptized, they become adopted sons or daughters of God.

covenant An open-ended contract of love between God and human beings. There are several covenants described in the Old Testament. The word *testament* means “covenant.”

- After Adam and Eve sinned, God still loved them. When they made the choice to turn away from God, the result was the loss of paradise, friendship and intimacy with God, and of harmony within themselves and creation. However, “after the unity of the human race was shattered by sin, God at once sought to save humanity part by part” (*CCC*, 56). He maintained a series of covenants between himself and human beings, beginning with Noah. “God buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption” (*CCC*, 55, quoting *Dei Verbum*, 3). There is no time in the history of creation that God has ever ceased his love for human beings.

The creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 are part of **primeval history**. The authors used language, myths, stories, and other devices from the religious beliefs of their neighbors in order to distinguish their understanding of the one, true God who had entered their history in a radical new way. They wanted these accounts to be meaningful to help the people of their time and place understand the origins of the world and of humankind. One of the most important lessons in the Genesis creation accounts is that God made humans as the summit of creation.

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. What scriptural evidence is there for saying that “Love created the world”?
2. According to St. Augustine, how can we understand the Blessed Trinity by looking at ourselves?
3. Summarize three lessons learned about God and the meaning of creation from the Genesis accounts.

primeval history The accounts humans have told and recorded about the origins of the earth, humans, other creatures, languages, and cultures.

Vocabulary

4. What did God offer the first humans in his *covenant* with them?
5. What does it mean to say that the creation accounts are part of *primeval history*?

Reflection

6. How would you answer someone who says the Genesis accounts are a "fairy tale" or a "made up" story of creation?



Section 2

HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE SUMMIT OF GOD'S CREATION

We've already defined the Big Bang Theory, formulated by the Belgian Catholic priest and physicist Fr. Georges Lemaître, who published a paper showing that the universe was expanding and that it therefore must have been at one point very condensed. The Big Bang Theory is the main cosmological model for the earliest moments of the universe. This theory—always in development—agrees with what the Church has always taught: creation (that is, the universe) has a beginning. Scientific thought about the world's origins also acknowledges that after its beginning, the universe and life on earth, in particular, have *evolved*.

Evolution can mean different things. When the term was used in 1859 by Charles Darwin in connection with his study of evolution by natural selection, it referred to the understanding that the diversity of life in our world came about through a series of small steps in which nature has “selected,” or preserved over time individuals and species best suited to survive. Many Christians were and are concerned about evolution, thinking that it implies God would have created a select number of living species over time and that those species then adapted on their own without God's intervention to create new species.

However, the Catholic Church does not share this concern about natural selection, holding, basically, that God is the Creator of everything and that natural selection, if scientifically accurate, is the way he chooses to create. Also, evolution is primarily a scientific study, not a religious study. The Church does not forbid research and study of the evolution of living species, including the human body. It is important to point out, however, that while the Church encourages the scientific study of theories such as evolution, it does have serious concerns, like other Christians, about atheistic Darwinism