

CHAPTER 8

Creation

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, covered in wet, reddish-brown clay, shaping a pottery wheel. The person's face is partially visible in the background, smiling. The clay is being molded into a rounded, bulbous shape. The background is softly blurred, showing more clay and pottery tools.

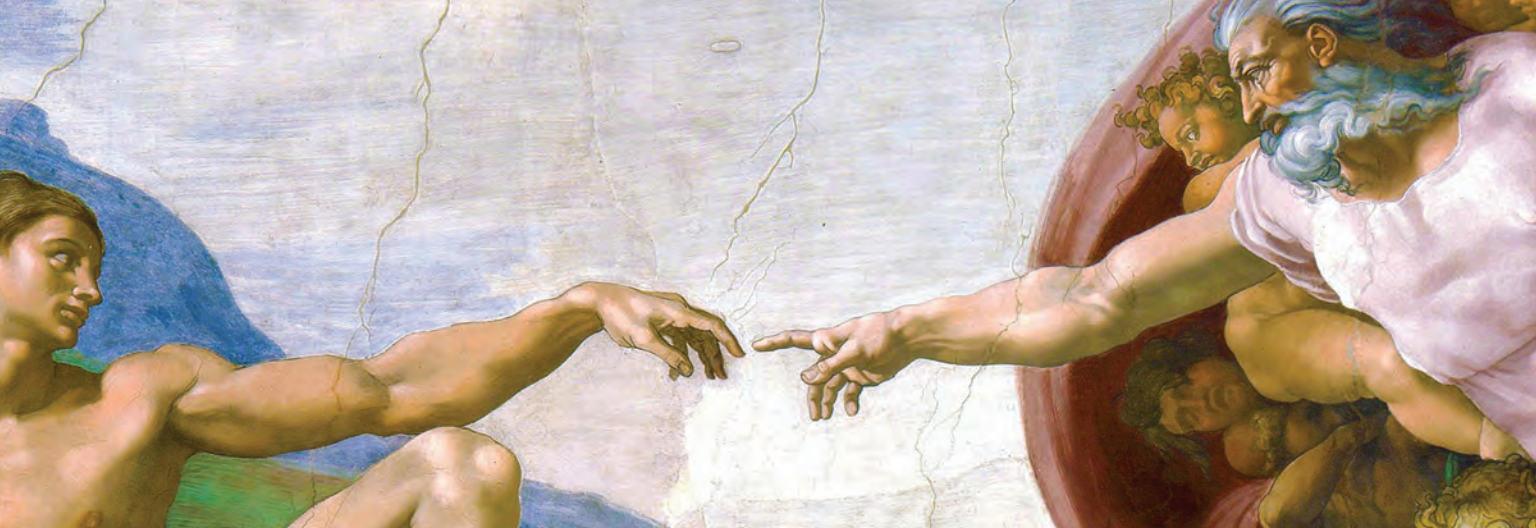
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In the Beginning

The pronouncements of modern atheists would not have shocked the sages of ancient Israel. There were scoffers aplenty in the ancient world. The Book of Psalms makes that clear, calling “fools” those who told themselves that there is no God (Ps 14:1; 53:1). And in the Book of Wisdom, we find a striking formulation of the secular cast of mind: “They reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, ‘Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a man comes to his end, and no one has been known to return from Hades. Because we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been; because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts. When it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air’” (Wis 2:1-3). The new atheists of our time are not perhaps so new after all. Whatever else an atheistic position may be understood to include or imply, it is plainly opposed to the Jewish and Christian conception of creation, and so our apology or defense of the faith must treat that essential and difficult doctrine.

Our discussion of the doctrine of creation has three parts. First, we will look at the doctrine itself, both as a theoretical position—at once philosophical and theological—and as it relates to various texts in the Bible, including the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. Second, we will examine Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, which is often, but erroneously, set in opposition to belief in God. Third, we will consider the Scriptural account of the Fall, which is an essential part of the Church’s theology of creation.

The Psalmist’s observation that “the heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps 19:1) was not alien to the first philosophers of ancient Greece. Thales (died ca. 546 B.C.), who thought that all things were made of water, is reported to have said that “the world is beautiful” because “it is of God’s making.” Anaxagoras (died ca. 428 B.C.), taking the thought of his predecessors one step further, had the beautiful intuition that the myriads of tiny parts of which the world is made—specks of matter of one kind or another—had been put into harmonious order by “mind”



or “thought.” Building on these affirmations, Aristotle worked out the arguments that prove that everything we see proceeds from a singular, ultimate cause, the one God, an immaterial mind—in Aristotle’s words, “thought thinking itself.”

The Catholic understanding of creation has much in common with this philosophical perspective. Consider St. John’s formulation of the doctrine in the prologue to his Gospel: “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 were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:1-3). From the treasures of revelation contained here, what we should ponder at this juncture is St. John’s stirring claim that the Word—in Greek, the *Logos*—was the author of the universe in its entirety, indeed of “everything that was made.” Here is an echo of the philosophical doctrine of the uniqueness and the simplicity of God that we have already encountered.

The natural light of reason allows us to arrive at a limited understanding of God by tracing effects back to a first cause. From that reasoning, we learn that the first cause must be uncaused, unique, and simple. With confidence, then, we can affirm that God brought the material universe into being from himself, by the entirely unconstrained choice of his will. For if God had been constrained in some way, then that cause outside of God and acting upon God would itself be greater than or prior to God the first cause—a notion which is absurd. Creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*) is, accordingly, what is called a preamble of the faith: it can be known by the natural light of reason, and it has also been revealed to us by God—in Genesis 1, John 1, and by the mother of the seven martyrs of the Book of Maccabees: “I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed” (2 Mac 7:28).

The philosophical and theological doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* illuminates the relation in which the world stands to God: as an effect to its cause. The doctrine does not, however, specify how the world

proceeded from God as its cause or even when it did so. On this point we encounter a rather startling teaching from St. Thomas Aquinas, who argued that we know by Divine Revelation alone, and not from reasoning, that the world had a beginning in time.

Aquinas treated the question at different times during his life and brought a number of arguments to bear upon it. We will note two of them. The first argument turns upon the fact that while a cause always precedes its effect in being, it does not typically precede its effect in time. In fact, our everyday experiences of causation involve the simultaneity of cause and effect, as when Sally kicks the soccer ball into the net. Her kicking and the ball's being kicked are separate in being—Sally is cause and the ball being kicked is an effect that depends upon that cause—but together in time. On the strength of this observation, Aquinas concluded that it is not self-contradictory to say both that God created the world and that the world has existed forever. (That these two propositions can be held together does not, for that, make them true; it merely makes it possible to hold them both at once.) Thus, if our inquiries are limited to reason alone, we might come to the conclusion that the world always was.

God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

Wisdom 7:28–8:1

The second argument is more difficult: that the world does not declare its newness or beginning in time. Informed by the work of astronomers, we might be inclined to disagree with Aquinas. Surely the world declares its age, we might say, and also its progression from simple to complex, from the “primeval atom” that exploded in the Big Bang to the profusion of galaxies that our telescopes reveal today. Aquinas, however, could note in reply that cosmologists admit that our instruments can only take us back to the first several seconds after the Big Bang, and that the conditions of the universe prior to that moment are only the object of our theories, and not of our empirical investigations. Moreover, it remains at least logically possible to ask what preceded the Big Bang and to theorize about multiverses or an oscillating universe. However much those theories may seem unsubstantiated, the most that can be said against them is that they are fanciful and that they do not repose upon

evidence, not that they are self-contradictory. The fact of the matter is simple: we cannot get back behind the beginning to watch it unfold. So, although it is entirely fitting that our cosmological theories should point to a first moment in the history of the universe, such theories neither prove the existence of God themselves, nor are they necessarily going to convince every astronomer and physicist. If we are to have certainty about the temporal origin of the universe, we are going to get that certainty only by believing what God has revealed to us. And so, the twofold “in the beginning” of Genesis 1 and John 1 is not and can never be in conflict with either science or philosophy. It is a revelation that takes us entirely beyond the scope of our scientific investigations and philosophical arguments.

The force of that “in the beginning,” as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out with luminous clarity, is as “the first and universal witness to God’s all-powerful love” (CCC 288). It constitutes the explicit response of the Christian faith to “the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: ‘Where do we come from?’ ‘Where are we going?’” This twofold question, as the *Catechism* then notes, is “decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions” (CCC 282). The point, then, of God’s having revealed that he created the world from nothing and “in the beginning” was to confirm and to elevate the philosophical truth that he is the world’s unique first cause, so that this truth would be accessible not only to the learned, but indeed to all men and women of whatever age or condition (see CCC 286). The truth of creation is what supports and makes intelligible our recourse to prayer, our confidence in Divine Providence, our decisive rejection of false gods, and our equanimity in the face of powers of every kind—whether hurricanes, evil people, or demons—that threaten to harm us. It is because the God who walked among us, suffered and died for us, and rose from the dead is also the God who created the universe that St. Paul was able to profess that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-9).

Aftermath from Hurricane Katrina which devastated New Orleans in 2005. The truth of creation is what supports and makes intelligible our recourse to prayer and our equanimity in the face of powers of every kind.



CHAPTER I.
1 The creation of heaven and earth, 3 of the light, 6 of the firmament, 9 of the earth separated from the waters, 11 and made fruitful, 14 of the sun, moon, and stars, 20 of fish and fowl, 24 of beasts and cattle, 26 of man in the image of God. 29 Also the appointment of food.

IN the beginning ^b God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. 3 And the spirit of God moved upon the waters.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was one of the earliest theologians to take up the task of interpreting Genesis 1. In his *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, he spoke with great energy about the danger of Christians “spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics,” that is, “about the earth and the sky, about the other elements of the world.” Those who make such claims risk bringing not only the doctrine of creation into contempt, but the authority of Bible and thus the faith as a whole. St. Augustine’s judgment was that this subject requires great caution:

It should be clear, then, that St. Augustine would not look favorably at attempts to find a “creation science” in the pages of the Bible. Writing fifteen centuries later, the authors of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* followed his interpretation. The inspired authors of the Book of Genesis gave to Israel the account of the six days of creation and of the sabbath rest not to offer a lesson in natural history, but instead to

“express in their solemn language the truths of creation—its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation” (CCC 289).

Theories of cosmic and biological evolution do not come into conflict with the Christian and Jewish belief in God as Creator. By coming to recognize the existence of God, we discover that God causes every other cause and maintains the universe’s existence by an act of creation that is entirely outside the realm of matter, motion, and time. Our empirical and theoretical investigations of the natural world can in no way overturn the truth that we are created by God, nor should they prompt us to doubt it.

The pillars of creation in the Eagle Nebula, so named because the gas and dust that they are made up of are in the process of creating new stars.



As to biological evolution, St. John Paul II memorably declared that the idea is “more than a hypothesis.” The statement was made in a context in which he could speak only briefly, but it may be taken to have been a gesture to the generally accepted age of the universe (approximately 13.8 billion years) and of the earth (4.5 billion), as well as to the progressive manifestation of the different kinds of living things on the earth that the fossil record reveals. Were he to have elaborated his statement, perhaps he would have said that it seems plain that once there was in the universe nothing but hydrogen and a bit of helium and that from that simple beginning there has unfolded a magnificent tapestry of being, as stars coalesced and gave birth to humble lithium, and eventually to carbon, and then, slowly, as the eons passed, to still heavier elements, and then planets, and at last, on this earth, to life. This story may certainly be called evolutionary, as too the story of the forms of life on earth, for in these stories the simple comes first and the complex afterwards. That

the story of the universe has such a shape seems clear; just how we are to go about telling it, however, is not. For his part, St. John Paul II was emphatic: there are “theories” of evolution, in the plural, and the task of adjudicating them requires not only the best possible scientific reflection, but also the illumination offered by philosophy and theology.

Darwinism: Pro and Con

Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection remains the most celebrated form of evolutionary theory, so we will limit our examination of evolution to it. There is much to be learned from Darwin, but there are also cogent reasons for thinking that his theory is only a partial one, which, like most scientific theories, will profit from further inquiry, reflection, and revision for decades to come.

If an evolutionary account is to be in any way illuminating, it must help us to understand the causes of what we already know to be the case from our common experience. In other words, an evolutionary theory must not only account for the existence of different kinds of living things but also preserve the confidence we gain from our everyday experience that nature does indeed present us with recognizable kinds of living things, such as oak, and robin, and squirrel.

Some of you are perhaps not much in the habit of noticing the kinds of trees, birds, and other living things that surround us. It could be that you are more aware of the differences you see among the people you meet or the automobiles that pass by than of the differences among the various kinds of plants or animals. Many of you, however, may be either avid gardeners and bird watchers yourselves or related to those who are, that is, to people who have learned to scorn such upstarts as the Norway maple and the starling and to prize the rare and beautiful orchid or warbler. It is with just that sort of confidence in knowing the kinds of things and loving them according to what they are that biological inquiry begins.

We take an interest in birds, for instance, precisely because we see in them intelligible patterns that suggest the presence of hidden causes that we can come to understand. For it is not a random set of sounds that we hear every spring in our backyards and neighborhoods, but rather a familiar mixture of the *dee-dees* and *fee-bees* of the chickadees, the sharp cries of the jays, the lilting if monotonous chanting of the robins, and, if we are lucky, the sweet affectionate songs of the bluebirds. If we

are able to distinguish among these various sounds and refer them to their proper performers, then we have begun to attain some knowledge of what the birds in question are, and we have started to learn about their natures, that is, about what kind of bird each of them is.

Darwin's own life as a biologist began with just that sort of experience. He was an accomplished field naturalist whose knowledge of the flora and fauna of Great Britain was already impressive prior to the voyage on the H.M.S. Beagle that took him around the world and showed him so many marvels. After his return to London in 1836, he was plunged into a maelstrom of controversy over the biological and geological history of the world, amidst a climate of opinion that can only be called over-heated. This was the era of Romanticism and Revolution. The Old Regime had been overturned in the French Revolution of 1789, and a new world of gas lights and railroads, utilitarianism and democracy had been born. In this context, it was impossible to theorize about the origins of the different kinds of living things without religious and political questions immediately arising. In England, the most popular form of biological thinking adopted a highly-conservative stance to the changes of the day and asserted the absolute fixity of the natural order: revolutions of all kinds, on this perspective, were unnatural and bad. This was the position contained in William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), a book whose arguments were not very astute. The elbow and eye, among other parts and organs, he took to be so many "contrivances" showing the immediate intervention of God in the natural order of things. The idea that an organism bears within itself the cause of its own life, growth, and development—an idea common to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas—was one that Paley did not hold.

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Given that he wrote in the context of Paley's conception of living things as so many machines contrived by God's immediate handiwork, it is understandable that Darwin should have rejected what then passed for creationism. What he chiefly sought to do, it may be argued, was to restore a truly biological view of animals and plants, which, after



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all, we see to be born one from another, with generation following generation reliably and without any evident intervention by the miraculous. Consider this formulation of his conviction: “all the chief laws of paleontology plainly proclaim, as it seems to me, that species have been produced by ordinary generation: old forms having been supplanted by new and improved forms of life, produced by the laws of variation still acting around us, and preserved by Natural Selection.” Or, again: “it is far more satisfactory to look at such instincts... as small consequences of one general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.” If Darwinism were nothing more than a persistent seeking for a biological explanation of the emergence of new natural kinds together with an intuition about how the exigencies of life tend to preserve those animals and plants capable of thriving in their ecological settings, it could be accepted by believing monotheists without much need for qualification.

Unfortunately, Darwin’s theory, whether in his own formulation or that of other interpreters, has always included much more. Or, perhaps it would be better to say, much less. There was a defect in Darwin’s thinking that has shaped most of those who have followed him: he did not sufficiently attend to the reality of natural kinds—that nature does not present us with a bewildering array of unique individuals. Rather, living things fall into more-or-less recognizable families, in the fully-reproductive sense of that word. Although Darwin was constrained to note the tendency of the offspring of an organism to resemble its parents, he never sufficiently reflected upon that great and central truth about living things. He was so troubled by the tendency of his contemporaries to insist upon the absolute fixity of species and the independent creation of them by so many miraculous divine interventions that he effectively set aside the reality of natural kinds, as, for instance here: “I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling one another.” As Darwin backed away from the intelligibility of natural kinds, he combined and confused

varieties, sub-species, and species until the designations became unreliable. Flux and the interrelatedness of living beings preoccupied him, to the point that when he declared “the origin of species” to be the “mystery of mysteries,” his accent was on the word origin rather than on the word species. Instead of explaining the different kinds of animals and plants, he had explained them away.



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In the century and half since Darwin wrote *The Origin of Species* (1859), the proponents of Darwinism have gone further in the same line, and their perspective has hardened. Yet however difficult it may be to distinguish one kind of sparrow from another, or however reluctant we may be to declare whether we think the red and the black oak are best thought of as varieties of a single species or as distinct species, we are nevertheless fully confident that animals and plants differ from one another not merely as individuals, but also as groups or kinds. We are even willing to bet our lives on our knowledge of these differences, as when a fisherman in Alaska will brave the presence of a black bear, but flee from a Kodiak, or when the mushroom enthusiast will harvest the morel (*Morchella* sp.) and leave behind the destroying angel (*Amanita bisporigera*).

Professional biologists can help us to wonder even more deeply about the persistent intelligibility of natural kinds. In this vein, biochemist Franklin Harold has called attention to the gut bacterium, *E. coli*. This one-celled creature reproduces itself in generations only minutes long and has DNA that is “notoriously mutable,” yet the fossil record offers us the remains of *E. coli* that are dated 100 million years in age but are recognizably the same as today’s, even at the level of their DNA. Indeed, a recent scientific article recounting a long-term study of *E. coli* spoke with great confidence about the high rate of evolutionary change that the investigators had been able to witness through careful analysis of the bacteria’s DNA, but failed to state the obvious point that, even after an experiment lasting 60,000 generations, the bugs were recognizably

what they were before, that is, *E. coli*. Considering this amazing stability of *E. coli* as a natural kind or species, Harold concluded that “biological patterns do change over time” but “not quickly,” and so was prompted to bring to his own evolutionary theorizing a question that is remarkably un-Darwinian: “Why, indeed, are there so many *kinds* of organisms large and small, and why do they cluster into discrete species?” If there is a mystery of mysteries in biology, this is it.

The reason for our dwelling on this point is worth reiterating as we bring this section to a close: Darwin’s theory of the emergence of new kinds of living things over time by the predominant action of what he called natural selection has unquestionable merit, but it does not tell us everything that we want to know about living things. The Christian response towards Darwinism, therefore, and towards evolutionary theories generally, should be one of lively interest tempered with caution.

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An example of this kind of response comes from one of America’s greatest early scientists, the Harvard botanist Asa Gray (1810-1888), a devout Christian. Gray calmly responded to the claim made by a prominent Protestant minister that Darwin’s theory was necessarily atheistic.

It is not for the theologian to object that the power which made individual men and other animals, and all the differences which the races of mankind exhibit, through secondary causes, could not have originated multitudes of more or less greatly differing individuals through the same causes. Clearly, then, the difference between the theologian and the naturalist is not fundamental, and evolution may be as profoundly and as particularly theistic as it is increasingly probable. The taint of atheism which, in Dr. Hodge’s view, leavens the whole lump, is not inherent in the original grain of Darwinism—in the principles posited—but has somehow been introduced in the subsequent treatment. Possibly, when found, it may be eliminated.

God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' co-operation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God's greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of co-operating in the accomplishment of his plan.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 306

Here Gray rightly insisted that God's work in creation extends to creating things that are themselves the causes of other things, as whenever we make something, assist someone with a task, or teach. As he pointed out, these secondary causes—the links in the chain we discussed in chapter 6—are themselves causes because of the prior causality of the first cause, which is God. Most effectively, then, did Gray labor to disassociate the speculations of evolutionary biologists from, on the one hand, the irresponsible and unnecessary claims of atheists, and on the other, the intemperate bluster of some of the atheists' opponents. This work of clarifying what science can say and what it cannot will doubtless be an arduous one, but Catholics should be certain that it can be successful. While we are about that work, we should imitate the serenity of Asa Gray, knowing that the doctrine of creation is unassailable and capable of being received on its own merits, that is, both by the natural light of reason and by the truthfulness of the God who has revealed it.



Original Sin: Truth of Reason or of Faith?

If one of the most important lessons of the Book of Genesis is that the creation is good and the result of God's free choice to bring the universe into being, we may naturally wonder why we encounter pain, suffering, death, and evil. For an answer, we turn to the second chapter of Genesis, in which we find God's revelation of another crucial beginning: the origins of the human race and its fall into sinfulness. The findings of archeologists and anthropologists may eventually be able to reconstruct a plausible story of the early history of humankind, and perhaps even say something about the hominid forms that seem to have been our biological precursors. Certainly, the remains of early humans show signs of violent death and at times even ritual sacrifice: we have no archaeological evidence of a lost paradise. What these sciences cannot give us, however, is empirical evidence of the Divine creation of the immaterial intellect of the first man and the first woman or of their equally-invisible descent into sin. Just as is the case with the origins of the universe, to learn about our race's origins, we must listen to God's Word.

The story of the creation and fall of humankind is disarming in its simplicity. Adam was created by God and placed in the garden of Eden with work to do, "to till it and keep it," and a single prohibition: "of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:15-7). So that Adam would not be alone, God created his spouse, later named Eve. Then disaster struck. The serpent asked a question of Eve that incited her suspicion of God: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" (Gen 3:1) And the arrow went home. As the *Catechism* says, with admirable directness, "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of" (CCC 397). Instead of trusting their Creator, Adam and Eve trusted the devil. They had every reason to believe that the God who had created them freely

out of love would provide for their future needs. But instead, they freely chose to believe Satan, who accused God of duplicity and jealousy (Gen 3:4-5), and intimated that Adam and Eve would be better off if they were the master and mistress of their own fate. The results were soon to make themselves apparent: alienation from God, from one another, and from nature, with continued alienation, sin, pain, and suffering for the generations that followed.



Benjamin West, The expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, 1791, Oil on canvas.

Let us pause to consider what this story purports to explain: the propensity of men and women to choose selfishly and irrationally, to the great harm of themselves and their fellow human beings. G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) famously quipped that the doctrine of original sin is “the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.” Armed with a necessary distinction, we can surely agree with him. The distinction, however, is essential. What can be proved from experience—both personal and historical—is that there is something wrong with us humans that manifests itself in a tendency toward selfishness and irrationality. What cannot be proved, but can only be learned from Divine Revelation, is the origin and deeper significance of that tendency.



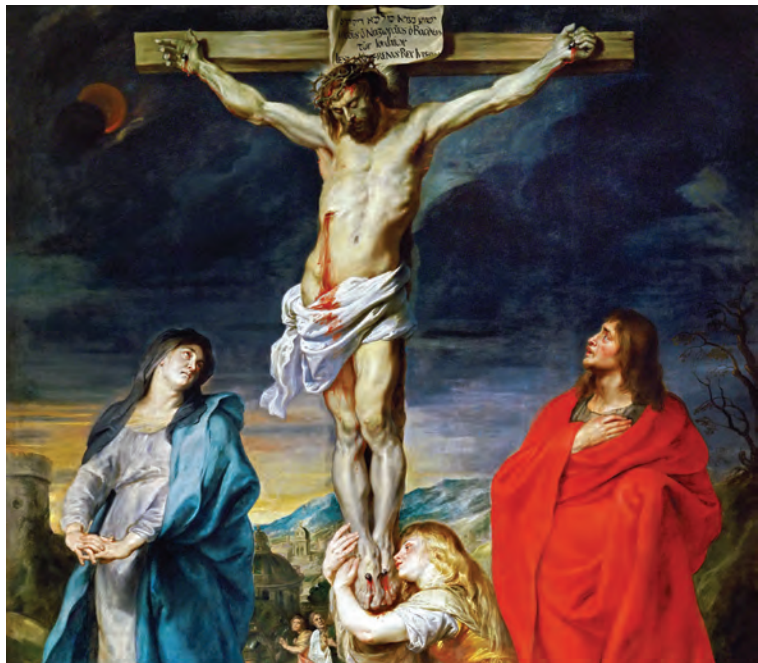
The human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity.

As to the proof or argument, no one has provided a more eloquent one than Blessed John Henry Newman:

To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12)—all this is a vision to dizzy and appall; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution. What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewildering fact? I can only answer, that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence...[and] since there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of

joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God.

This haunting passage from Newman's autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), takes the matter of proof as far as it can go. The great tapestry of human affairs depicts a tragedy. Without Christ to save us from ourselves, our lives would be bleak indeed. It is astonishing that Newman should have written in this vein before the horrors of the holocausts of the twentieth century—Hitler's satanic slaughter of the Jews, Stalin's cruel massacre of millions, and the worldwide genocide of abortion over the past half-century.



Sir Anthony Van Dyck, Christ Crucified with St. John and Our Lady, 1619, Oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris, France.

To conclude that the human race is fatally flawed and to hold the Catholic doctrine of original sin are two different mental acts. Fully to understand the doctrine of original sin is only possible in light of the truth of Jesus Christ (see CCC 388). For in the last analysis, the doctrine of original sin and the Genesis account of the Fall of Man are revealed to us as the key to human affairs that they are only by and in Christ—the Word made flesh—who time and again forgave sins and healed, called for repentance and preached the path of holiness, offered himself as a sacrifice, and, the sacrifice accomplished, returned to the right hand of the Father. To the direct examination of these mysteries, then, we must now turn.

Review Questions

1. How is the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing) a preamble of the faith, that is, at once philosophical and theological?
2. St. Thomas Aquinas argued that we cannot know the newness of the universe—that the world had a beginning in time—from the light of natural reason alone. What do you think he would say about the Big Bang theory?
3. What is the Catholic interpretation of Genesis 1-2, as exemplified by St. Augustine and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? How is Catholic “creationism” thus different from other varieties of creationism?
4. How did Charles Darwin’s theory of the origin of species by the action of natural selection constitute a more properly biological way of thinking than the belief in the fixity of species that was popular at the time?
5. The Book of Genesis teaches us that humankind’s primordial sin was one of disobedience and involved a choice of autonomy or self-rule. What insight does this doctrine offer into the human psychological condition?
6. How does the Catholic doctrine of original sin help to explain the social and political condition of the world today?

Put Out Into the Deep

For an introduction to the theology of creation that briefly treats the interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis, one can do no better than Joseph Ratzinger’s *‘In the Beginning...’ A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, translated by Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (Eerdmans, 1995). A book that pursues the investigation at greater length and makes a wise foray into the interpretation of evolutionary theories is Christoph Cardinal Schönborn’s *Chance or Purpose?: Creation, Evolution, and a Rational Faith*, translated by Henry Taylor (Ignatius, 2007).