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GOD'S GOOD CREATION: THE BEGINNING OF SALVATION HISTORY

*God created man in his image;
in the divine image he created him;
male and female he created them.*

—Genesis 1:27

- **Model of Compassion**
The saving deeds of our Lord in the Paschal Mystery reveal God's love, forgiveness, and compassion.
- **Origins of the World and Humankind**
Natural questioning about the existence and meaning of life leads us to answers from Divine Revelation, God's free gift of self-communication by which he makes known the mystery of the divine plan.
- **How Scripture Is Interpreted**
Special attention to the literary forms and the intention of the sacred authors are among the ways we can understand the meaning of Scripture.
- **The First Creation Account
(Genesis 1:1-2:4a)**
The first creation account contrasts ancient creation myths by expressing the inspired belief in the one, true God—Yahweh—who entered their history in a radical new way.
- **The Second Creation Account
(Genesis 2:4b-25)**
The second creation account was written by the Yahwist author who portrays God as anthropomorphic, that is with human qualities.
- **The Theme of Creation in Theology
and Scripture**
The foundational theme of creation is the foundation of God's saving plans and is the subject of Catholic theology and throughout all of Scripture.

Model of Compassion

Professional golfer Roberto De Vincenzo is perhaps best known for a mistake he made in signing a scorecard. In the final round of the 1968 Masters Tournament De Vincenzo signed an incorrect scorecard that had been prepared for him by his caddie. The scorecard incorrectly stated that he made a par on the seventeenth hole when, in fact, he birdied it, that is, shot one under par on the hole. His birdie would have tied him with the eventual champion, Bob Goalby. However, under the Rules of Golf, when a player signs an incorrect scorecard, the score stands. Due to this error, De Vincenzo came in second. A lesser man would have been embittered by this mistake and the unbending rules of golf, but not Roberto De Vincenzo. He accepted full responsibility for not checking the accuracy of his scorecard before signing it. He simply said, “What a stupid I am.”

Roberto De Vincenzo continued his career by playing superb golf. Worldwide, he won a remarkable 230 tournaments, including the prestigious British Open. Along the way, he garnered many

honors including the Bob Jones Award for distinguished sportsmanship in golf.

The mark of his character shines forth in an incident that happened late in his career. As De Vincenzo left the clubhouse after winning another tournament, a young woman approached him and congratulated him on his victory. She then began to cry and tell him that she was jobless and had a baby who was near death. She said that she could not afford a doctor or hospital bills. De Vincenzo paused a moment and then asked, “May I help your little girl?” He endorsed his winning check, handed it to the woman, and wished her and her sick baby well.

A week later, a Professional Golfers’ Association official told De Vincenzo that the lady in the parking lot had defrauded him. She was childless and told her sad story to fleece him out of his money. De Vincenzo asked the official, “You mean there is no dying baby?” The golf official said, “That’s right.” De Vincenzo face lit up with a huge smile, “Well, that’s the best news I’ve heard all year.”

Roberto De Vincenzo’s relief and compassion in the face of an evil that had befallen him remind us how God deals with us. He forgives us time and

The Goodness of Creation

Genesis 1–3 reveals important theological truths about the origins of creation, humans, and sin. Among these truths is that God creates a good and orderly world (Gn 1:31). This includes the natural world: the sky and sun, the moon and the stars; lakes and rivers, waterfalls and rainbows; trees and flowers, fields and mountains; all kinds of animals; and human beings most of all. “God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance for and entrusted to him” (CCC, 299). Many times the Church has had to defend God’s gift of creation, including that of physical creation. Related to the teaching of the goodness of creation, complete the following assignment and reflection.

Assignment

With a digital camera, take five photos that represent the goodness of creation. Print out your favorite photo and adhere it in your journal. Write a paragraph explaining how this picture makes you feel.

Reflection

- How happy are you with the way that God made you?
- What is the best thing about you?
- If Jesus were to tell someone about you, what might he say?

again despite our dishonesty, deception, and sinfulness. God's forgiveness and compassion come to us most completely in the Person of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. He is the Good News of our Salvation.

The subject of this book is Jesus the Savior. In examining his compassion, you will be studying in greater depth those saving actions of our Lord known as the Paschal Mystery. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights the importance of the Paschal Mystery:

The Paschal Mystery of Christ's cross 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 for all" by the redemptive death of His Son Jesus Christ. (CCC, 571)

At the heart of the Paschal Mystery are Christ's redemptive Death on a cross and his glorious Resurrection, which have won for us the forgiveness of sin and eternal life with the Blessed Trinity. The story of God's redeeming activity in human history, which reaches its completion in our Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection, starts at the very beginning of human history with the creation of the first humans, named in Genesis as Adam and Eve. Their fall from grace, known as Original Sin (see Chapter 2), ruptured their relationship with God. But God did not abandon them or their human descendants to sin. This is the story of Salvation History, a history that reaches its peak in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

For Reflection

What do you think about Roberto De Vincenzo's decision to give the woman money and his later reaction when he found out that there was no sick child?

Origins of the World and Humankind

Think back to when you were a three-year-old, perhaps taking a walk with your beloved grandfather. You were outside enjoying the beauties of the natural world, chatting about this and that. As all young children do, you asked your grandfather things about the world around you. Likely the most frequent questions you asked began with a simply "why?" "Why are things like they are, Granddad?" You needed to know then, and you need to know now.

One of the most basic thought processes for humans is questioning. We want to figure out the meaning of our own lives and the larger scope of what it means to be human. We are meant to seek and to know the truth. We want reality to make sense, so we ask questions in our search for answers and meaning. Albert Einstein (1879–1955), had this to say about natural human inquiry:

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.

Einstein was not a particularly religious man, but he saw questioning as something that can lead us to seek God who made us to seek truth.

Think back again to an earlier time in your life. As you grew older, you began to ask even more questions—very personal ones that had to do with your origins. For example: How did Mom and Dad meet? Where did they come from? Why did they settle here? Why was I born in this time, in this place, with these relatives? What does life have in store for me? Why do I have to die? What is the

Philosophy

The investigation of truths and principles using human reason.

Pantheism

The belief in opposition to Christian doctrine, that God and nature are one and the same.

Polytheism

The belief, in opposition to Christian doctrine, that there are many gods.

Redemption

A word that literally means “ransom.” Jesus’ Death is ransom that defeated the powers of evil.

Salvation History

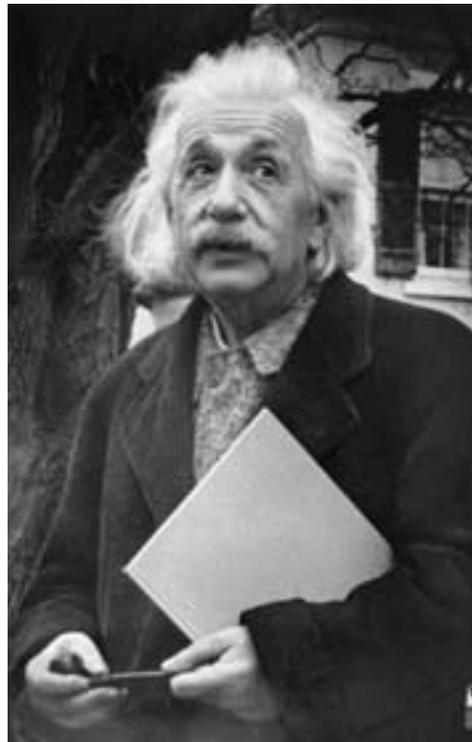
The story of God’s saving actions in human history.

Divine Revelation

The way God communicates knowledge of himself to humankind, a self-communication realized by his actions and words over time, must fully by his sending us his divine Son, Jesus Christ.

meaning of life—of my life? Where did everything come from?

You are in good company if you ask questions like these because you are indeed engaged in a holy activity—that of thinking and searching for truth. Through the ages, men and women have tried to make sense out of reality, to seek meaning in the world around them. This helps explain the existence **philosophy**, the name for the systems of thought that try to provide rational explanations of why things are the way they are and how we know and should conduct our lives. Most of these systems of thought have concluded that behind the life we see and experience there must be a source of all life—something or someone greater than we are who brought it into existence and sustains it. When asked whether he believed in God or not, Albert Einstein replied,



I am not an atheist. . . . We are like a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn’t know what it is. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being toward God. We see the universe marvelously arranged and obeying certain laws but only dimly understand those laws.

Down through the centuries, various religions and cultures have tried to discern the origin of the world and all creation. Using only human reason, different religions have come up with many diverse, and often conflicting, theories. For example, Hinduism holds that the universe is the same as the force that created it. This is known as **pantheism**, the religious belief that the material world and God are one and the same. Other ancient religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism) held that there are two equal spirits in the universe, one evil and the other good, who are constantly engaged in a cosmic struggle. Still other religions are based in **polytheism**, that is, they believe there are many gods who are responsible for the creation of the world.

Although by studying his works by the natural light of human reason we can come to know the one true

God with certainty, it is not the whole story, because human reason is limited. Various philosophies based on human reason and other religions are limited too. Catholics respect the beliefs of these other religions about God and the origins of the world. The Church's perspective on these life questions is unique and unequalled. Catholics and other Christians believe that the Divine Author is a loving Father who has sent his only Son to live among us, to teach us about the Father, to show us how to live, and to redeem us so that we can one day go to a blessed home of happiness and joy in Heaven. The Second Vatican *Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* taught:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (*Nostra Aetate*, No. 2).

While the Church does respect other religions, she has been entrusted with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She must share with others the Good News that he is the "way, the truth, and the life." St. Ambrose (340–397) explained the Gospel message this way:

When we speak about wisdom, we are speaking of Christ. When we speak about virtue, we are speaking of Christ. When we speak about justice, we are speaking of Christ. When we speak about peace, we are speaking of Christ. When we speak about truth and life and Redemption, we are speaking of Christ.

St. Ambrose understood that all that is important in life is the Person of Jesus Christ. This text focuses

especially on Ambrose's last point—**Redemption**. Jesus is our Redeemer. He is the one who will make it possible for us share in God's own life:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. (*CCC*, 51 quoting the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 2)

Understanding Divine Revelation

Out of God's infinite mercy and love, he stepped into human history to disclose who he really is. He did this through the events of **Salvation History**, that is, the account (of both deeds and words) of God's saving activity for humankind. In other words, God *revealed* himself to the world.

Recall that **Divine Revelation** is God's free gift of self-communication by which he makes known the mystery of the divine plan. God's divine plan

Deposit of Faith

“The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, handed on in the Church from the time of the Apostles, from which the Magisterium draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed” (CCC, Glossary).

Sacred Tradition

The living transmission of the Church’s Gospel message found in the Church’s teaching, life, and worship. It is faithfully preserved, handed on, and interpreted by the Church’s Magisterium.

Sacred Scripture

The inspired Word of God; the written record of God’s Revelation.

inspiration

The guidance of the Holy Spirit that enabled the human authors to record faithfully, and without error, what God wanted revealed to us for our beliefs.

Magisterium

The official teaching office of the Church. The Lord bestowed the right and the power to teach in his name to Peter and the other Apostles and their successors. The Magisterium is the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome (Pope).

is to communicate his own divine life to the men he freely created, in order to adopt them as his sons in his only-begotten Son. In brief, this is the answer to the ultimate question of why we are here. We are here because God created us to know him, to love him, and to be called in communion with him (CCC, 27). Jesus reveals most fully what that communion means: adoption as sons and daughters into the divine family.

How do we know what God has revealed? Divine revelation is contained in a single **Deposit of Faith**, which Christ turned over to the Apostles after his Ascension into Heaven. The Apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, handed on this deposit, or “heritage of the faith,” to the Church. They did this through their oral preaching and their writings, both done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is why all generations since the Apostles can hear about God’s love for us in Jesus Christ until he returns in glory at the end of time. We find the single Deposit of Faith in Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.

The word *tradition* means “handing on.” **Sacred Tradition** is the living transmission or “handing on” from one generation to the next of the Church’s Gospel message. **Sacred Scripture**, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the written record of Revelation. It is “the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, No. 9, CCC, 81). Jesus Christ is

the unique Word of Sacred Scripture, both its starting and ending points. His presence is revealed in human words of both the Old Testament and New Testament. The Scriptures tell us that the Word of God became man and saved us from sin.

We can rely on the truth of Sacred Scripture because it is inspired. God used the human authors and their unique talents to put into writing exactly what he wanted written, and nothing more. Likewise, we can only understand the meaning of Scripture when it is “read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written” (CCC, 111 quoting *Dei Verbum* 12 § 3). This is the meaning of **inspiration**.

The books of the Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided in Sacred Scriptures. (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, No. 11, CCC, 107)

When Christ entrusted the Deposit of Faith to the Apostles, he authorized them to interpret God’s Word authentically. This authority keeps the Church free from error and guarantees that Christ’s Gospel is passed down authentically to future generations. Jesus gave this teaching authority to the Apostles’ successors—the Bishop of Rome (the pope) and the bishops in communion with him. This authority is known as the **Magisterium**. The Holy Spirit guides the pope and bishops so that they can serve the Word of God, listen to it faithfully, preserve

ST. IRENAEUS OF LYONS

The life of the Christian is essentially knowing Jesus Christ. It is also in being known yourself. No one is intended to live life in isolation. You must both know Christ and his Father and be known by them. These essential insights of our faith were gleaned by St. Irenaeus, a Father and Doctor of the Church, who was bishop of Lyons in Asia Minor in the late second century.

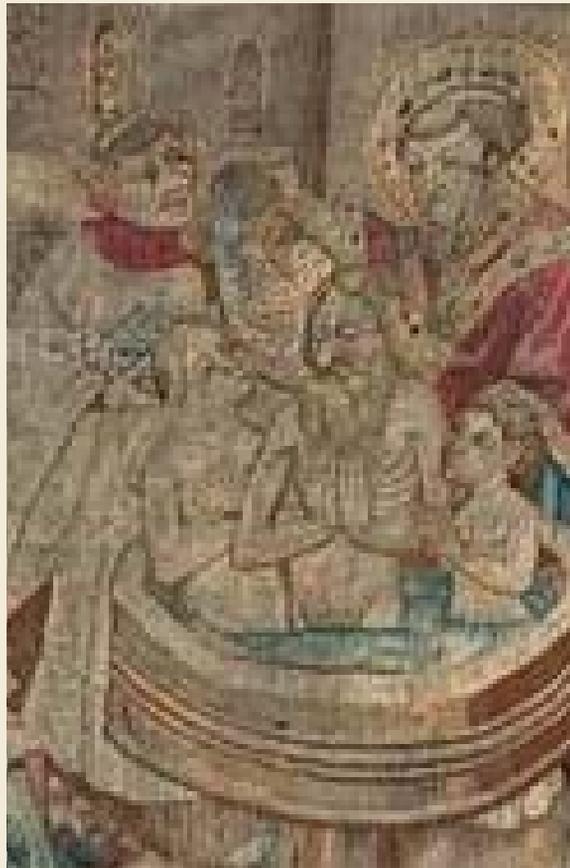
Irenaeus was born around the year 125 in a seaside province in Asia Minor. He likely had the chance to hear the Gospel directly from one of the Apostles or their immediate disciples. Irenaeus was ordained a priest and served under the bishop, St. Pothinus. In 177, Irenaeus was sent to Rome. While he was gone, the Church in Lyons faced severe persecutions. St. Pothinus and other Church leaders were martyred. Eventually Irenaeus was sent home to replace Pothinus as bishop.

Irenaeus was left to face another challenge in the region that was affecting the entire Church, the heresy of Gnosticism. This was the name for movements in the second century that claimed secret, revealed knowledge of God had been transmitted to either the Apostles or the leader of a Gnostic sect.

St. Irenaeus answered the Gnostics in his treatise *Against Heresies*. He also highlighted the importance of Church Tradition for arriving at religious truth. He wrote that the source of right teaching and belief resides with the Roman Church because the Church was founded by Jesus and entrusted to St. Peter.

It was in *Against Heresies* that Irenaeus wrote about the glory of God being witnessed in the person who is fully alive:

The glory of God gives life; those who see God receive life. For this reason God, who cannot be grasped, comprehended or seen, allows himself to be seen, comprehended and grasped by all, that he may give life to those who see and receive him. It is impossible to live without life, and the actualization of life comes from participation in God, while participation in God is to see God and enjoy his goodness.



Faithful Disciples

it through the ages, and explain it to the Church so that we can live according to Christ's teachings.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are vital in the story of Salvation History because they reveal important truths about the creation of the world and of humans, of the relationship between males and females, of God's intentions for us, of Original Sin and the fall from grace, and of God's promise of a future Redeemer. This next section focuses on the first two chapters of Genesis. Before Genesis 1—11 are discussed as a whole, it is necessary to first address the figurative, symbolic language used by the authors of Genesis so that we can correctly interpret what religious truths God wants us to learn from this opening book of the Bible—a book that answers many important *why* questions about human existence.

For Review

1. What questions are humans naturally conditioned to ask?
2. What does philosophy attempt to do?
3. Define *pantheism* and *polytheism*.
4. What is unique about the Christian belief about Revelation?
5. Define *Salvation History* and *Divine Revelation*.
6. Briefly state God's divine plan of Salvation for human beings.
7. Define the *Deposit of Faith*?
8. What is the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition?
9. What special role does the Magisterium play in relationship to the Deposit of Faith?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CREATION

• Why did God create?

God did not have to create. He is complete perfection in himself. He created the world to manifest his glory. God did not create to increase his glory, which is impossible, but to show forth and communicate his goodness, truth, and beauty.

• What does the glory of God mean?

“Glory” is the recognition and praise of someone's excellence. Applied to God, it means recognizing God's absolute goodness, love, beauty, power, majesty, holiness, and perfection.

• Why did God create humans?

God created us out to share his love and goodness and “to be his sons through Jesus Christ,” that is, to adopt us into the divine family and share his eternal life with us.

• How do we humans glorify God?

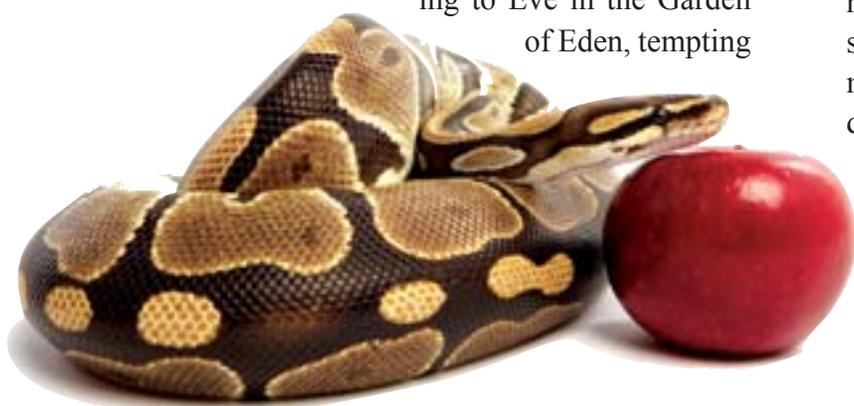
St. Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is man fully alive.” We are fully alive when we know, love, and serve God; when we offer back to him in thanksgiving all of creation in this world; and when we are raised up to eternal life with him in Heaven. We are truly human when we become other Christs, the perfect Man, the Son of God, who is the perfect image of God.

For Reflection

- What questions about the meaning of life do you have? List some steps you can take to find some answers to these questions.
- The typical human cell has forty-six chromosomes. A single human chromosome contains twenty billion bits of information, the equivalent of about three billion letters or five hundred million words. Assume further that there are three hundred words on a page of written text; this would correspond to about two million pages of text on one chromosome! Imagine how rich a library of information goes into making one human being. Discuss one other phenomenon from the natural world that would lead you to believe there is a Creator-God.

How Scripture Is Interpreted

The inclusion of *two* creation stories in the first two chapters of Genesis presents a quandary. You might question why there are two accounts of the same event. You might also wonder how these stories came to be since there was no one around at the time of creation to record them! Similarly, in Genesis 3, we have the story about a serpent (Satan) talking to Eve in the Garden of Eden, tempting



her to eat the fruit of a tree. It is certainly valid to ask: could a snake really talk in the Garden?

Reading the Bible with understanding requires us to recognize that it deals with a time, people, and culture that are foreign to us. To interpret it correctly requires that we gather some background information on the text, including being able to distinguish between figurative and symbolic language and what should be taken literally.

The Second Vatican Council offered guidelines on how to interpret Sacred Scripture:

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

Note the meaning of this teaching of the Second Vatican Council. First, God used humans and human language to communicate his message. Therefore, we must first figure out what the authors of the texts really meant

exegesis

A Greek word meaning “to lead.” It is the study or the explanation of a biblical book or passage.

photo

by their written words. To do so requires that we pay close attention to literary forms, that is, the different kinds of literature (literary genres) that appear in the Bible. For example, we would interpret a fable differently than a piece of news reporting. The fable might present an important lesson on how we should behave using an imaginative story, whereas a news story would present “just the facts” as they occurred. We could learn the truth about some aspect of human behavior from the lesson the fable is trying to teach without having to believe the story took place as written.

Also, we should pay attention to the customs and ways of speaking, feeling, and passing on information that took place at the time the sacred author was writing. For example, a teaching of the creation stories is that the human person, created in God’s image and likeness, is a being with both corporeal (bodily) and spiritual aspects. The way the biblical author drew out this point in the second creation account was to say that “the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being” (Gn 2:7). In these words the biblical author revealed this truth: “Man, whole and entire, is therefore *willed* by God” (CCC, 362).

After identifying the literary form, we must ask the further question: What did God want to teach by way of these words, that is, by using these literary forms? To answer this question, we must read the text in the spirit in which it was written. *The*

Constitution on Divine Revelation continues:

But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. (12)

What this means is that the Holy Spirit has inspired the sacred writers to reveal the truths of our religion in both the Old and New Testaments. Together, they are a unity and express the speech of God in human words. Finally, the Magisterium of the Church has the task of drawing on Sacred Tradition as it “carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”

More on Literary Forms

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council that “Sacred Scripture must be read in light of the same Spirit by whom it is written” (*Dei Verbum*, 3) is an essential starting point for the interpretation of biblical texts. Also, it is important to interpret Scripture from two main senses—the literal and spiritual. These two ways for looking at and interpreting Scripture shape the way the Bible is to be understood.

The first way is to look at the literal sense of Scripture. The literal sense refers to the literal meaning conveyed by the words and discovered by **exegesis**. The goal of exegesis is to lead or bring out the biblical author's intentions, purpose, and meaning related to the writings. The precise literal sense refers to what the written words mean as they are written. There are several types of literary forms in the Bible. Examples from the Old Testament include:

- *Anthem*. An anthem is a joyful song or hymn. The beginning of Psalm 27 is an example of an anthem:

The Lord is my light and salvation;
whom should I fear?
The Lord is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid? (Ps 27:1–2)

- *Census*. A census is an official numbering of the people of a country or district. See Numbers 1–14.
- *Debate*. A debate discusses a problem in a back-and-forth way. The debate in Job 4–30 starts with his curse and includes discussions with his friends. The debate ends when God intervenes.
- *Epigram*. An epigram is a short poem, often making a caustic point at the end. Note the example in Proverbs below. The first two verses give advice; the third verse tells what will happen if you do not follow it.
Hear, my son, and be wise,
and guide your heart in the right way.
Consort not with winebibbers,
nor with those who eat meat to excess;
For the drunkard and the glutton come to poverty,
and torpor clothes a man in rags.
(Prv 23:19–21)
- *Etiology*. An etiology is a story that gives the cause of something. In Genesis 32:23–33, for example, an explanation is given for why “the Israelites do not eat the sciatic muscle that is on the hip socket.”

- *Genealogy*. A genealogy provides a list of ancestors and their descendants. Genesis 5 gives the descendants of Adam up to the time of the sons of Noah.
- *Maxim*. A maxim is similar to a proverb. It states a brief practical principle for daily living. For example: “Two are better than one: they get a good wage for their labor.”
- *Parable*. A parable is a vivid short story told to convey religious truth, usually with a surprise ending. For example, Isaiah 5:1–6 tells the story of a vineyard that yielded only wild grapes, so it was destroyed. Verse 7 interprets the parable by comparing the vineyard to the nation of Israel.

There are many other literary forms in both the Old and New Testaments. One starting point for understanding the biblical text is to be able to identify the form and how the sacred author wanted his words understood by his audience. A second way of interpreting Scripture involves not just looking at the words themselves, but also at what the words signify. The spiritual sense can be divided into three subdivisions:

1. Allegorical, that is understanding Scripture by recognizing its connection and significance with Christ. For example, the story of Jonah in the belly of the large fish references the three days Christ spent in the tomb.
2. Moral, or how the Scripture ought to lead us to act more justly. For example, Ruth teaches us the importance of loyalty in our relationships.
3. Anagogical (Greek for “to lead”), reminding us that the sacred words are intended to lead us to eternal life.

It is the task of everyone from biblical scholars to everyday Christians to judge, interpret, and read a biblical literary form according to these senses of Scripture and to do so ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, “which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching

over and interpreting the Word of God” (*Dei Verbum* 12 § 3, CCC, 119). Only then will we know the truths God wished to convey through the human authors and their literary styles.

For Review

1. Why is it important to pay attention to literary forms when reading the Bible?
2. Name and explain three examples of literary forms found in the Old Testament.

For Reflection

Share an important truth for living from a childhood fable or story that you find meaningful.

The First Creation Account (Genesis 1:1-2:4a)

Both creation accounts are part of the **primeval history** of Genesis 1—11. These stories are drawn from an ancient literary form known as **myth**. The myths of ancient peoples tried to express spiritual truths and basic cultural beliefs in the form of stories or narratives. Many of these ancient folktales use common themes and symbols like creation near or from water, battles between heavenly powers, and the creation of humans from the earth.

In their primeval accounts of creation, the Israelites borrowed some of the traditional elements, symbols, and stories from the myths of their neighbors, many of whom believed in many gods controlling life here on earth. In the first Genesis creation account, the author shows great knowledge of the Babylonian creation myth known as *Enuma Elish*,

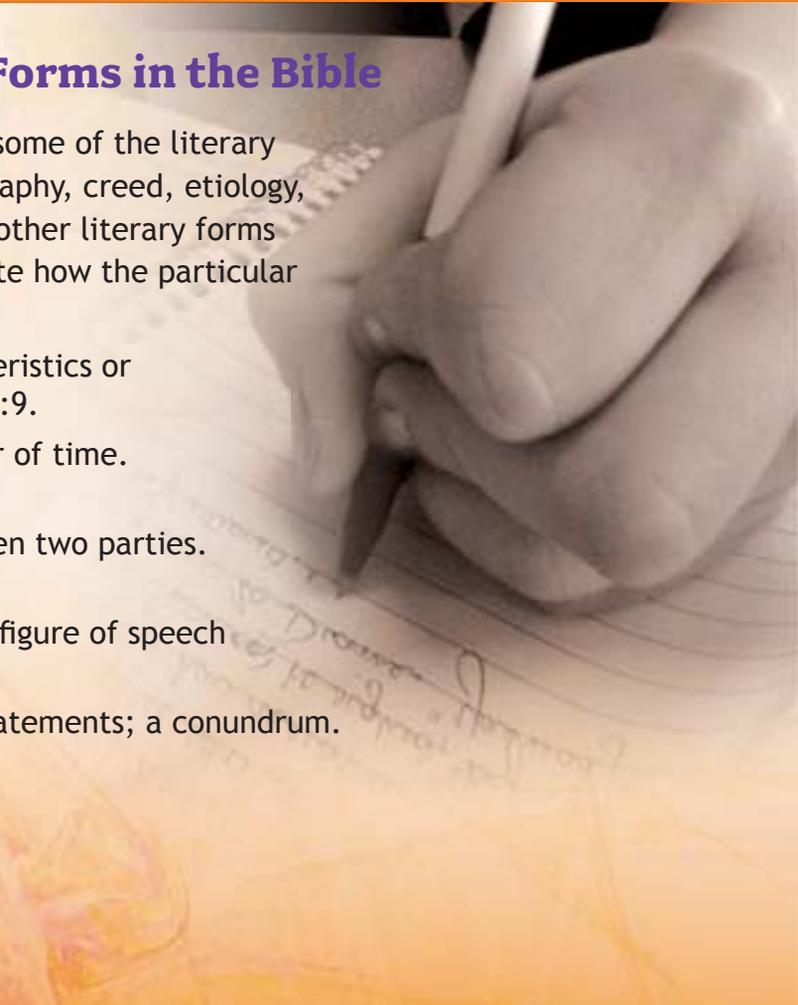
More Examples of Literary Forms in the Bible

In the first text in this series, you learned about some of the literary forms used in the Bible, including allegory, biography, creed, etiology, fable, history, law, and prophecy. Below are five other literary forms from the Old Testament. Read the examples. Write how the particular example fits the definition of the form.

- *Anthropomorphisms* attribute human characteristics or experiences to God. Example: 2 Chronicles 16:9.
- *Chronicles* are accounts of events in the order of time. Example: Ezra 1.
- *Contracts* are binding legal agreement between two parties. Example: Ruth 4:1-12.
- *Hyperboles* are deliberate exaggerations as a figure of speech to make a point. Example: Psalm 119:136.
- *Riddles* are thought-provoking questions or statements; a conundrum. Example: Judges 14:12-18.

Assignment

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-4. Identify its literary form.



though the Genesis story does not accept its view of many gods, all springing from the gods of fresh and salt water. Marduk emerged as the hero in the story as he created the heavens out of the carcass of the goddess Tiamet whom he slayed. He also created humans out of the blood of another god to be slaves so that the gods could rest. The Israelites, inspired by the Holy Spirit, changed these traditional stories and symbols to convey their belief in the one true God—Yahweh—who entered their history in a radical new way.

Contrast this Babylonian myth with the forceful, stately, and grand style of Genesis 1:1–2:4a where creation is the result of an awesome, dramatic act by a glorious and majestic God. The intention of the author was to show the Jews who were in captivity in Babylon, or had just recently returned to Jerusalem, that their God is the only true God. Yahweh is the God who creates only goodness. He is totally unlike the false gods of Babylon, who it was believed created humans out of the death of a slain god and intended humans to be slaves. A clear telling of the first creation account to the Israelites was: “God has selected *you* as his Chosen People. He has been faithful to *you*. Therefore, *you* must be faithful to him.”

In composing the story of the origins of the world, the author may have drawn on the Israelites’ tradition of a seven-day week, in which the seventh day, the Sabbath, was a day of rest and prayer. Creation takes place in six days, with each day representing a

higher level of creation. Humans are at the peak of God’s design. The refrain “God saw how good it was” delineates each day. It also stresses the goodness of everything God made, in contrast to the Babylonian and other ancient myths that held that some creatures were evil.

The author seems to have used a brilliant parallel construction to distinguish between separation and decoration: God divides on the first three days, he decorates or “adds to” on the next three days:

Note how in this first creation account both males and females are created at the same time. God creates both man and woman in the divine image:

Separation	Decoration
Day 1: light from darkness	Day 4: bodies of light—sun, moon, stars
Day 2: sky from water	Day 5: birds and fish
Day 3: land from water	Day 6: life on land—animals and humans

Then God said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”

God created man in his image;
 in the divine image he created him;
 male and female he created them. (Gn 1:26–27)

Primeval history

Stories or myths about the origins of the earth, humans, other creatures, languages, and cultures.

myth

Symbolic stories that express a spiritual truth or a basic belief about God.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PENTATEUCH

To understand the Book of Genesis, it is necessary to understand how it fits within the entire **Pentateuch**. The Pentateuch (meaning “five scrolls” in Greek) contains the **Torah**, that is, the Law of the Jewish people. The other four books of the Pentateuch are Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch is also known as the “Book of Moses,” or the “Five Books of Moses,” because ancient Judaism and early Christianity believed that Moses authored them. Even the New Testament assumes this, for example, when Jesus refers to the Pentateuch as “the Book of Moses” (Mk 12:26).

However, the Church understands that the first five books of the Bible only took their final form after centuries of telling, retelling, adapting, and reinterpreting the many stories of Yahweh’s dealings with the Chosen People. It is true that Moses is the central figure of the Pentateuch since God delivered the Ten Commandments to him on Mount Sinai and he led the Israelites out of Egypt. The Israelites naturally looked to him as the source of the laws and traditions recorded in the Torah. However, Moses certainly could not have written *everything* in the Pentateuch. For example, Deuteronomy 34:5-12 gives an account of Moses’ death.

The Pentateuch was likely composed in stages, probably proceeding this way:

- *Stage 1:* The core incident in the Pentateuch is the strong personality of Moses, the lawgiver, and the events of the Exodus, God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.
- *Stage 2:* Various laws, speeches, stories about human origins and the patriarchs, reflections, liturgical celebrations, and so forth, were handed down orally from generation to generation. Some of these were committed to writing as well.
- *Stage 3:* Authors and editors began to collect their sources into a continuous narrative.
- *Stage 4:* Sometime during the fourth and fifth century BC under the leadership of the priestly scribe Ezra, the various traditions were brought together into the five-volume document we know as the Pentateuch.

Most scholars believe there were at least four major sources that went into the composition of the Pentateuch. Because the Pentateuch (including Genesis) is a composite work, later authors and editors did not always try to reconcile all the differences in the stories and traditions that came down to them. They simply included their stories right along with the stories of other authors. A most notable example of this is the two creation accounts that appear right after each other in the first three chapters of Genesis.

The four major traditions or sources that are behind the Pentateuch are:

- *Yahwist (J).* This tradition originated around 950 BC in the southern kingdom of Judah. Its name comes from its frequent use of *Yahweh* (or *Jahweh* in German) for God’s name. This source emphasizes the divine promises made to the patriarchs and provides the basic outline for the Pentateuch: human origins, patriarchs, slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, the desert wanderings, the covenant on Mount Sinai, and entrance to the Promised Land.

Pentateuch

A Greek word meaning “five scrolls.” It is used to refer to the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The books contain the Jewish Law, the Torah.

Torah

The Law handed down to the Chosen People by God that they were to live in response to his covenant with them. A summary of the Torah is found in the Ten Commandments.



- *Elohist (E)*. Traceable to the northern kingdom of Israel, which uses Elohim, a generic name for “god” in Hebrew, this source came about one hundred years after the Yahwist. The “E” source emphasizes prophecy (especially the message of Elijah and Elisha) and the theme of covenant. More abstract than “J” tradition. Abraham is a central figure in the Elohist narrative. Additionally, many scholars believe that around 750BC an editor combined J and E into one narrative without bothering to drop repetitions or contradictions.
- *Deuteronomist (D)*. The name Deuteronomist is derived from a Greek word meaning “second law.” First composed in the northern kingdom at the shrine at Shechem in approximately 650 BC, it may have been completed in Jerusalem. This source refers to God as *Yahweh* and emphasizes morality and living the Law. “Listen, Israel” is a constant refrain. Central also are several long speeches by Moses.
- *Priestly (P)*. This source originated during the Babylonian Exile and was likely completed around 400 BC. The Priestly account refers to God in the formal “Elohim” like the Elohist and is interested in census lists, genealogies, numbers, dates, liturgical procedures, Temple ceremonies, ritual cleanliness, and so forth. It also emphasizes worship because it sees God’s action in the history of Israel as a liturgy. Because P was the last tradition, it gave a coherent framework to the Pentateuch. Priestly editors under Ezra gave the first five books of the Bible their final form.

By saying God rested on the seventh day, the biblical author reminds the Jews of their own obligation to worship God on the Sabbath (from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday). Sabbath observance helped captive Jews maintain their identity as God’s Chosen People among a foreign people with pagan beliefs. They believed they should offer thanks and praise to God each week because he is the source of all that is good.

Religious and Theological Truths of the First Creation Account (CCC, 290-373)

This first creation account is not a scientific explanation of the beginning of the universe. Rather, God inspired its author to draw on the knowledge of the people of his time to construct a story that reveals important *religious* and *theological* truths about creation, including these:

1. There is only one God. The biblical authors wrote that God is eternal and gave a beginning to all that exists outside of himself. The priestly author of this first creation story firmly rejects the vindictive false gods of the Babylonians portrayed in their creation myth, Enuma Elish.
2. God planned creation. Creation did not result from anything else like chaotic forces, warring gods, fate, or chance. God created the world in an orderly way to share his being, wisdom, and goodness with us. God creates by his Word, decreeing what is to be and establishing limits.
3. God created an ordered and good world out of nothing. Material creation is good and not the result of magic or the workings of false gods. The Babylonian creation story told how humans emerged from the rotting corpse of a god. Ancient peoples believed that much of material reality is evil and constantly at war with the spiritual elements in the universe. In



contrast, Jews and Christians see in Genesis a positive view of created reality. The biblical author tells us that God was pleased with everything he made, especially human beings made in God's own image and likeness and entrusted with responsibility for the rest of creation.

4. God creates man in his own image, male and female. We are unique because:
 - We possess great dignity, value, and worth. Man is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake” (CCC, 356, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 3). We are able to know and love God. We are predestined to share in the eternal goodness of God himself by reproducing in our own lives the image of Jesus Christ, God's Son made man, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).
 - Human nature unites both the spiritual and material worlds. Humans are endowed with bodies and souls, the spiritual principle in us.
 - God created males and females as perfect in equality as human persons, with inalienable dignity. They are privileged to share in God's great gift of creation by being given the power to procreate life, “Be fertile and multiply” (Gn 1:28).
5. *God gave humans a place of honor in creation, making them stewards over what he created.* We are responsible for taking care of and developing the many gifts of creation God entrusted to us.
6. *God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.* The priestly writer tells how God rested on the seventh day. Obviously, God does not need to rest. But we, God's creatures, need to take time to be renewed by ceasing from ordinary activities one day out of the week. Furthermore, we need to recognize a kind and loving God as the source of our existence and worship him in prayer and thanksgiving. Catholics keep Sunday holy, the first day of the week and the day

of Christ's Resurrection by participating at Mass and refraining from unnecessary work.

These six truths emerge from the magnificent first creation story. They highlight our belief in the one, powerful, good, wise, and loving God who shares his life with his creatures.

For Review

1. Define: *Pentateuch* and *Torah*.
2. Summarize the stages involved in composing of Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch.
3. Briefly identify the four sources that are behind the Pentateuch.
4. What is the purpose of the ancient literary form known as *myth*?
5. Discuss at least three religious and theological truths that emerge from the first creation account.

Keeping Sunday Holy

In commemoration of the day of our Lord's Resurrection, Catholics are obligated to gather to celebrate the Eucharist to thank God for all the good gifts he has bestowed on us, especially the gift of Salvation won for us by Jesus Christ, our Savior. Catholics also rest from regular work and activity on Sundays. Analyze how you spent the past two Sundays. In your journal, note what activities you engaged in that showed you take “Sabbath rest” and the “Sunday obligation” seriously. If your review shows that you have neglected to “keep holy the Lord's day,” write out some resolutions on how you might observe it more faithfully this coming weekend.

For Reflection

- What does it mean to you to have been created in God's image?
- How has your understanding of God been enhanced by reading and praying with the Book of Genesis?

The Second Creation Account (Genesis 2:4b-25)

The second creation account is written in a more down-to-earth style and it portrays God as *anthropomorphic*, that is with human qualities. Some scholars attribute it to the Yahwist (J) author and have dated it some time in the tenth century BC.

The account images God as a potter who molds Adam's body like a delicate sculpture. Into this form Yahweh breathes his spirit, the breath of life. This intimate picture reveals the loving relationship

between Yahweh and the first human being. In the first creation account, humans are created last by God. In this second account, Yahweh creates humans before any other creatures and shares his own life (breath) with them. This image of this closeness between human and divine radically contrasts with the beliefs of most ancient peoples who thought God was distant and to be feared.

The author describes a compassionate God who cares for Adam by making him a garden and sending him animals for companionship. God puts Adam in charge of creation by permitting him to name the animals. (In the ancient world, the power to name gave one control over what was named.) However, animals do not fulfill Adam's basic human need for companionship.

This is why the author gives a further story, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. This highlights a rich image of the dignity of women and their equality with men. This second story provides an etiology of marriage, that is, why men and women leave their parents to form their own family. The story reveals that Yahweh wants the couple to "become one

Preserving the Earth

There is rightful concern today about ecology and the degradation of God's good creation. The challenge is to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. You can do a lot to make people aware of the need to conserve precious resources. Try one of the following recycling projects. Advertise your project on an approved Internet network. Consider the following examples for projects:

- Begin a paper-recycling contest between classes at your school. (Recycling one ton of paper saves seventeen trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4,000 kilowatts of energy, 7,000 gallons of water, and sixty pounds of air pollutants).
- Recycle Styrofoam cups and trays.
- Establish stations around the school for recycling batteries.
- Start a campaign to eliminate the drinking of bottled water. Encourage people to refill their personal jars or cups from a tap or other common water dispenser.



Original Holiness and Original Justice

The state of man and woman before sin. “From their friendship with God flowed the happiness of their existence in paradise” (CCC, 384).



body,” to enter into a close relationship that mirrors God’s own relationship with them. Man and woman are equal and complementary, intended by God to be true companions.

The author who is sometimes associated with the Yahwist or “J” understanding tells us that Adam and Eve felt no shame, even though they were naked. Their natural condition of intimacy with God and each other was one of total openness. Only when sin entered the picture did human beings feel ashamed and want to hide.

After examining these two creation accounts, we can better understand why the final editor of Genesis was inspired by God to include two different creation accounts. Together they reveal something very important about our God: *Yahweh, the awe-inspiring sole creator of the universe (story 1) is intimately concerned with the man and woman he made the jewels of his creation (story 2).*

Religious and Theological Truths of the Second Creation Account (CCC, 369-379)

The second creation account emphasizes both the equality and differences between man and woman that are willed by God. It teaches that God created humans in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with themselves and all the creation around them.

The second creation account also teaches that Adam and Eve were born

in a state of **Original Holiness and Original Justice**.

The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, in the light of the New Testament and Tradition, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original “state of holiness and justice.” This grace of Original Holiness and Original Justice was “to share . . . divine life. (CCC, 375)

Original Justice and Original Holiness involved the inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and the harmony between our first parents and all of creation. As long as the first humans remained in intimacy with God, they would not have to suffer or die. Work was not a burden but a share in perfecting God’s visible creation.

Man and woman were created for each other, for companionship, to be helpmates to each other, and to share in God’s work of creating new life. Furthermore, they were to love everything God created for them and to responsibly care for the world he entrusted to them.

For Review

1. Name at least one difference between the two creation accounts.
2. Name three anthropomorphisms in the second creation account.

3. Name a religious and theological truth revealed in the second creation account.

For Reflection

How do you imagine the Garden of Eden before sin? Describe in detail.

The Theme of Creation in Theology and Scripture

The first three chapters of Genesis are foundational because they reveal important truths about 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). The theme of creation is very important in Christian theology and in Sacred Scripture. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it this way:

Creation is the foundation of “all God’s saving plans,” the “beginning of the history of salvation” that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”: from the beginning God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ. (CCC, 280)

The next sections highlight the theme of creation elsewhere in the Old Testament and New Testament.

Creation in the Book of Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah was written to comfort and encourage a disheartened people who were in captivity in Babylonia in the sixth century BC. The complete Book of Isaiah is a collection of poems composed chiefly by the great prophet but also by his disciples, some of which were written years after his life. Included in chapters 40–55, sometimes called Deutero-Isaiah or “Second Isaiah” are links to the theme of creation and Salvation that assured Israel that God controls all nations and events:

I am the Lord, who made all things,
 who alone stretched out the heavens,
 when I spread out the earth, who was
 with me? (Is. 44:23)

Who has cupped in his hand the waters of
 the sea,
 and marked off the heavens with a span?
 Who has held in a measure the dust of the
 earth,
 weighed the mountains in scales
 and the hills in balance? . . .

Do you not know
 or have you not heard?
 The Lord is the eternal God,
 creator of the ends of the earth.
 (Is 40:12, 28)

The poet intended for a discouraged people to know that God is in charge. He is both almighty Creator and Savior. He will renew the face of the earth by creating rivers in the desert and making crooked paths straight. The passage is intended to let the people know that just as God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, made a covenant with them, and created them as a people, he will rescue the captives from the Babylonians. Also, God will renew the people just as he renews creation:

I am the Lord, there is no other;
 I form the light, and create the darkness. . . .
 Let justice descend, O heavens, like dew
 from above,
 like gentle rain let the skies drop it down.
 Let the earth open and salvation bud forth;
 let justice spring up!
 I, the Lord, have created this.
 (Is 45:7–8)

Creation in the Book of Psalms

The Psalms are “songs of praise” to God. The book of Psalms is a source of inspiration, instruction, hope, consolation, and instruction for both Jews and Christians. Creation is a central theme in many Psalms, stressing God’s uniqueness, power, and majesty, while reminding us that we should worship God. Psalm 8 is an example of a hymn of praise that highlights God’s greatness. The psalmist is awestruck at God’s creative activity and especially at God’s marvelous creature—humans: “You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:6).

Another example of the theme of creation is found in Psalm 104, a majestic hymn that praises God’s creative wisdom and power. The psalmist’s heart leaps to the heavens praising God’s majesty:

Bless the Lord, my soul!
 Lord, my God, you are great indeed!
 You are clothed with majesty and glory,

robed in light as with a cloak.
 You spread out the heavens like a tent;
 you raised your palace upon the waters.
 You make the clouds your chariot;
 you travel on the wings of the wind.
 You make the winds your messengers;
 flaming fire, your ministers. . . .
 How varied are your works, Lord!
 In wisdom you have wrought them all;
 the earth is full of your creatures. (Ps
 104:1–4, 24)

Creation in the Book of Proverbs

All wisdom has its source in God. Wisdom is an expression of God’s own nature. The Book of Proverbs personifies wisdom and praises it as God’s helper in the act of creation. Specifically, Proverbs 8 stresses the role of divine wisdom at the beginning of creation. God’s wisdom was responsible for an orderly, intelligent, and joyful creation:

“The Lord begot me, the first-born of his ways,
 the forerunner of his prodigies of long
 ago; . . .
 When he established the heavens I
 was there,
 when he marked out the vault over the
 face of the deep;
 When he made firm the skies above,
 when he fixed fast the foundations of
 the earth;
 When he set for the sea its limit,
 so that the waters should not transgress
 his command;
 Then was I beside him as his craftsman.”
 (Prv 8:22, 27–30)

Christ and Creation

With the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we have access to the fullness of Divine Revelation. We learn from St. Paul that “Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 12:24). The



Letter to the Colossians proclaims the identity of Jesus Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God,
 the firstborn of all creation.
 For in him were created all things in heaven
 and on earth,
 the visible and the invisible,
 whether thrones or dominions or principalities
 or powers;
 all things were created through him and
 for him.
 He is before all things,
 and in him all things hold together.
 He is the head of the body, the church.
 He is the beginning, the firstborn from the
 dead,
 that in all things he himself might be
 preeminent.
 For in him all the fullness was pleased to
 dwell,
 and through him to reconcile all things
 for him,
 making peace by the blood of his cross

(through him), whether those on earth or
 those in heaven. (Col 1:15–20)

These remarkable verses, perhaps originally an
 early Christian hymn, proclaim our Lord to be:

- the *Agent of Creation* (“in him were all things
 created”),
- the *Wisdom of God* (“the firstborn of all cre-
 ation,” as in Prv 8:22),
- the *Sustainer* (“in him all things hold
 together”),
- and the *Savior* (God reconciles everything
 through him).

The Gospel of John tells us Christ is also the
 Word of God who spoke creation into existence. Ev-
 erything was created through him:

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.

What came to be through him was life,
 and this life was the light of the human
 race;
 the light shines in the darkness,
 and the darkness has not overcome it.
 (Jn 1:1–5)

The Holy Trinity and Creation (CCC, 290-292)

New Testament passages like Colossians 1:15–20
 and John 1:1–5 reveal very clearly that God created
 everything by the eternal Word, the Son of God. In
 addition, the Church professes belief in the creative
 activity of the Holy Spirit. He is the “giver of life”
 and “the source of all good” as proclaimed in the
 Catholic creeds.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for spirit is
ruah, which can be translated as both “wind” and
 “breath.” Recall the mighty wind in Genesis 1:2 that
 swept over the waters when God created the heavens

and earth. This image powerfully points to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit from the very beginning. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit came to the Apostles on Pentecost Sunday in a strong driving wind (Acts 2:2). His descent on them emboldened Christ's disciples and formed them into the Church that would proclaim the Resurrected Lord to the ends of the earth.

“Breath” is also an apt image for the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. To live, we must breathe. Thus, the Holy Spirit is a life-giver. The psalmist knew this well when he wrote about God's creative activity:

When you send forth your breath, they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.
(Ps 104:30)

This image of God sending his Spirit to bring life also reminds us how the Spirit was present at the creation of the first man, when God breathed life into Adam (Gn 2:7).

In conclusion, then, we must understand that when God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” in Genesis 1:26, the words suggest the activity of all Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Only God alone can reveal himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the teaching of the Church—that creation is the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament suggests and the New Covenant reveals the creative action of the Son and the Spirit, inseparably one with that of the Father. This creative co-operation is clearly affirmed in the Church's rule of faith: “There exists but one God. . . he is the Father, God, the Creator, the author, the giver of order. He made all things by himself, that is, by his Word and by his Wisdom,” “by the Son and the Spirit” who, so to speak, are “his hands.” Creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity. (CCC, 292)

This chapter presented an overview of the biblical accounts of God's creation. Creation is the first stage of Salvation History, revealing God's glory and his existence. The psalmist said it so well when he proclaimed, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims its builder's craft (Ps 19:2). And in the words of the famous poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” As the astronaut Frank Borman observed, “The more we learn about the wonders of our universe, the more clearly we are going to perceive the hand of God.”

God's hand is in creation. He is the master builder who made human beings in his image to share life with him. God's creation is very good. From the beginning, humans were meant to be in communion and harmony with our loving God. However, the tragic consequences of Original Sin remain with us. But God did not abandon us. He promised a Savior who would redeem us from sin and death. We turn to that promise and God's fidelity to it in Chapter 2.

For Review

1. Share one example of how the creation theme is present in an Old Testament book other than the Book of Genesis.
2. What role does Christ have in creation?
3. How is the Holy Spirit involved in creation?
4. Why do Catholics believe that the creation is the work of the Blessed Trinity?
5. What does the Church believe about evolution?

For Reflection

- Write your own song of praise to God for the gift of creation. Read Psalm 148 as inspiration.

EXPLAINING THE FAITH

What does the Church teach about evolution?

The word *evolution* means many things to different people. The term has been applied to the origin of the universe, to the origin of life, and to the origin of humans.

A popular definition of evolution found in a typical biology text might define it as “change over time.” This definition applies to any sequence in the events of nature. Another common understanding of the term refers to the idea that a group of organisms are descended from a common ancestor. Some people would hold that all organisms have come from a common ancestor. People explain these changes in various ways. For example, atheistic scientists might explain them by way of an unguided, materialistic process of random variation and natural selection. Believers, however, will view what some people see as mere chance in nature as God’s ongoing, providential action in his creation of life and of human beings.

In light of Divine Revelation, what can Catholics believe about evolution? The Church teaches that scientific truth and truths of the faith that come from Divine Revelation do not contradict each other. They are complementary paths to the one Truth. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us:

Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth. (CCC, 159, quoting Dei Filius 4:DS 3017)

Concerning the origin of the universe, Genesis teaches that God created the entire universe, both material and spiritual aspects of it, out of nothing at the beginning of time. The Church does not take a position on whether the stars, nebulae, and planets were all created at once or developed over time. However, if they did develop (evolve)—and are developing (evolving)—over time, it is according to God’s plan.

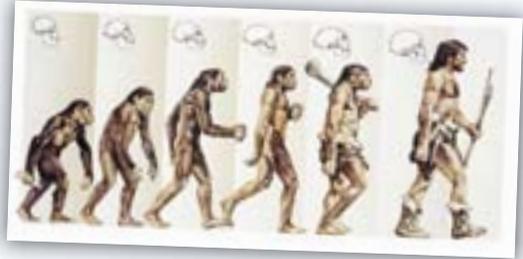
Turning to biological evolution, the Church has not taken an official position on whether life forms developed over the millennia. Once again, however, if various life forms did develop over time, it is because God has guided their development because he is the One who ultimately created them.

Concerning human evolution, the Church would permit belief that the human body *might* have developed from previous life forms but that God creates each human soul. The human soul, our spiritual nature, does not evolve from matter, nor is it inherited from our parents like our bodies are. Rather, God creates each individual human soul:

The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not “produced” by the parents—and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection. (CCC, 366)

However we interpret the “six days of creation,” either literally or symbolically, the biblical text requires that we hold that the universe did not always exist. God is infinite and eternal. He created the universe and that is when time began. The *Catechism* puts it this way:

Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God the Creator. The world began when God’s word drew it out of nothingness; all existent beings, all of nature, and all human history are rooted in this primordial event, the very genesis by which the world was constituted and time begun. (CCC, 338)



Main Ideas

- The story of Redemption begins at the beginning of human history, at creation. (pp. 00–)
- Human reason can come to know God by studying his works, though that is not the whole story, because human reason is limited. (pp. 00–)
- God disclosed who he is through the events of Salvation history. (pp. 00–)
- We know what God has revealed through the gift of the Deposit of Faith, Sacred Tradition, and Sacred Scripture working together. (pp. 00–)
- The Deposit of Faith is entrusted to the Magisterium. (pp. 00–)
- To read the Bible with understanding, we must recognize that it deals with a time, people, and culture that is foreign to us. (pp. 00–)
- There are dozens of literary forms in the Bible, including anthem, epigram, etiology, parable, and more. (pp. 00–)
- The Book of Genesis is part of the Pentateuch that contains the Torah, that is, the Law of the Jewish people. (pp. 00–)
- Both Genesis creation accounts are part of primeval history recorded in Genesis 1–11. (pp. 00–)
- The first creation account changed traditional stories and symbols of ancient myths to convey the Chosen People’s belief in one, true God—Yahweh. (pp. 00–)
- The second creation account portrays God as anthropomorphic, that is with human qualities. (pp. 00–)
- The second creation story also highlights the fact that the first humans were born in a state of Original Holiness and Original Justice, the grace of which was to share the divine life. (pp. 00–)
- The theme of creation is present in Catholic theology and Sacred Scripture as the foundation of all of God’s saving plans and the beginning of Salvation History. (pp. 00–)
- With the coming of Jesus Christ, we have access to the fullness of Divine Revelation. (pp. 00–)
- Creation is the work of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (pp. 00–)
- The Church teaches that scientific truth and the truths of faith that come from Divine Revelation do not contradict each other. (pp. 00–)

Terms, People, Places

Match the following terms with the definitions below.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. inspiration B. polytheism C. Deposit of Faith D. Divine Revelation E. philosophy F. Magisterium G. myth H. Torah I. Original Holiness and Original Justice J. Redemption | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The official teaching office of the Church. 2. The guidance of the Holy Spirit to help in the recording of Sacred Scripture 3. A word that means “ransom.” 4. A summary is found in the Ten Commandments. 5. God’s self-communication. 6. Symbolic stories that express a spiritual truth or a basic belief about God. 7. The state of man and woman before Original Sin. 8. Contained in both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. 9. A false belief that there are many gods. |
|--|--|

10. The investigation of truth and principles using human reason.

Primary Source Quotations

Our Creator God

The Trinity is our maker. The Trinity is our keeper. The Trinity is our everlasting lover. The Trinity is our endless joy.

—Bl. Julian of Norwich

In God alone there is primordial and true delight, in all our delights it is this delight that we are seeking.

—St. Bonaventure

The Lord Lives in Our Life

Invisible in his own nature God became visible in ours. Beyond our grasp, he chose to come within our grasp.

—St. Leo the Great

Poor creature though I be, I am the hand and foot of Christ. I move my hand and my hand is wholly Christ's hand, for deity is become inseparably one with me. I move my good and it is aglow with God.

—St. Simeon the New Theologian

Search for the poem "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. Prepare a dramatic reading of the poem. Consider setting the reading to music. Share the poem with your classmates.

Ongoing Assignments

As you cover the material in this chapter, choose and complete at least three of these assignments.

- Research various theories on the probable location of the Garden of Eden. Present your findings in a PowerPoint presentation.
- Conduct and record interviews on the subject of belief in God with one of the following audiences:
 - Five children under the age of ten on what they believe about God. Identify any statements they make that reveal wisdom that goes beyond their years.
 - Five believing adults on why they believe in the existence of God. Note any common reasons they might give.
- Research a Native American religion. Find answers to these questions:
 - What is its concept of the Almighty?
 - What do they believe about how humans came to be?
 - How do they view the reason for human existence?
 - What are their beliefs about human destiny and concepts of the afterlife?
- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on how humans have abused the environment. Show how thoughtlessness is contrary to the biblical concept of good stewardship.
- Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on Psalm 104. Use pictures from nature to accompany the words. Choose suitable background music.
- Report on George Sim Johnson's article, "How to Read the First Chapter of Genesis" *Lay Witness* (September, 1998). Report on the story of the Catholic priest behind the "big bang theory" of the origin of the universe. See Mark Midbon, "'A Day Without Yesterday': Georges Lemaitre & the Big Bang" *Commonweal* (March 24, 2000): 18–19.
- Research and report on the subject of science and creation.
- Research and report on the creation myth from a religion and culture other than Christianity.
- Report on what three early Church Fathers and theologians taught about Genesis.
- Research the topic "Ecological Footprint." Take one of the quizzes you discover to see how much of the earth's resources you consume.

Prayer

St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) is one of the most popular Catholic saints. He is the patron saint of ecology due to his great love of God’s beautiful creation. He wrote the following prayer toward the end of his life. It is a wonderful hymn of praise to God the Creator and Father of us of all.

Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor,
and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your
name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your crea-
tures,

especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light
through him.

And he is beautiful and radiant in all his
splendor!

Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister

Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother
Wind,

and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister
Water,

which is very useful and humble and pre-
cious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother
Fire,

through whom you light the night and he is
beautiful

and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister
Mother Earth,

who sustains us and governs us and who
produces

varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your
love,

and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be
crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will
find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord,

and give Him thanks

and serve Him with great humility. AMEN.

- *Reflection:* What is it in God’s creation that you are most grateful for?
- *Resolution:* In the coming days, focus on each of the five senses in turn. For example, one day choose the gift of sight. Several times a day, stop and concentrate on this gift of sight and all the beautiful things it enables you to see. Recite a short prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for this gift. On subsequent days, focus on the other senses in turn, praising and *thanking* God for what they enable you to perceive.

