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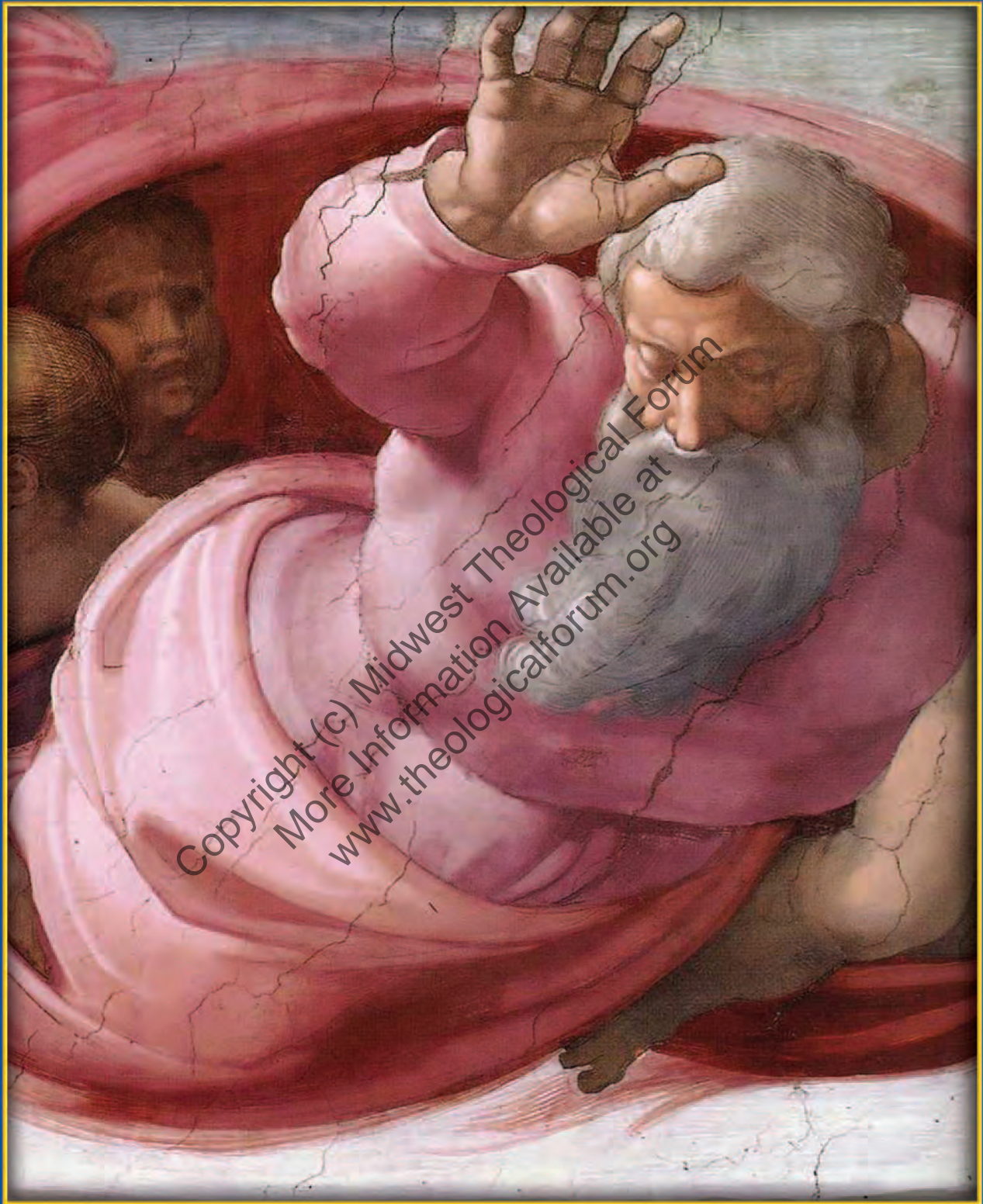
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The Church

CHAPTER 1



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God Prepares the Way for His Church in the Old Testament

Beginning with Adam and Eve, God gradually unfolded his plan of salvation to the world.

The Church

CHAPTER 1

God Prepares the Way for His Church in the Old Testament

Christians of the first centuries said, “The world was created for the sake of the Church.”¹ God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the “convocation” of men in Christ, and this “convocation” is the Church. The Church is the goal of all things...²

Just as God’s will is creation and is called “the world,” so his intention is the salvation of men, and it is called “the Church.”³ (CCC 760)



From all eternity, God had a plan to draw all people into *communion* with himself—a plan that was put into effect at the dawn of *creation*. Even after the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve, God did not abandon his people, but provided a plan for their *redemption*. He promised to send them a *Redeemer*, who would restore mankind to his friendship.⁴ In this manner, God foresaw Christ and the Church from the very dawn of creation. Thus, “we begin our investigation of the Church’s mystery by meditating on her origin in the Holy Trinity’s plan and her progressive realization in history.”⁵

Beginning with Adam and Eve, God gradually unfolded his plan of salvation to the world. He established covenants with his people and revealed his moral law to prepare mankind for the coming of his Son.

The stories in the *Old Testament* relate the gradual *Revelation* of God to the world. In the fullness of time, God fulfilled his promise of a Redeemer, sending his Son, Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus would reveal the fullness of truth and reconcile God and man, restoring the communion that had been lost in Original Sin. Thus, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the pivotal event in human history.

Through his Death on the Cross, Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The salvation won by Christ on Calvary continues today through the ministry of the Church, and it is through the Church that God reconciles his people with himself.

The Church is both the means and the goal of God’s plan: prefigured in creation, prepared for in the Old Covenant, founded by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, fulfilled by his redeeming cross and his Resurrection, the Church has been manifested as the mystery of salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She will be perfected in the glory of heaven as the assembly of all the redeemed of the earth.⁶ (CCC 778)

The Church founded by Christ is known as the Family of God, the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Bride of Christ, the Sacrament of Salvation, and by many more names, each of which illuminates specific aspects of the Church’s nature. However, the common thread linking each of these names is the Church’s relation to God. Apart from its communion in Christ and intimate sharing in the Divine Life of the Blessed Trinity, the Church has no life. This means that the Church is entirely “Christ-centered.”



Holy Trinity by Balen. The Church founded by Christ is known as the Family of God, the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Bride of Christ, the Sacrament of Salvation, and by many more names, each of which illuminates specific aspects of the Church's nature.

Like the dual nature of Christ himself—true God and true man—the Church has two distinct natures. As the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church is a divine institution. As a community, into which individuals are incorporated through Baptism, the Church also has a human dimension. In order to better understand the nature of the Church, therefore, we need to go back to the very beginning of the human story to see how God prepared his people for the coming of Christ and the establishment of his Church.

IN THIS CHAPTER, WE WILL ADDRESS SEVERAL QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Why were we created?
- ❖ How did God prepare his people for the Church?
- ❖ How was the Church foreshadowed in the Old Testament?
- ❖ What is the meaning of *covenant*?
- ❖ What covenants did God establish with the Israelites?
- ❖ What were the primary features of the Old Testament Covenant, and how did these features point the way to the New Covenant?



God Creating the Sun, the Moon and the Stars by Brueghel. Created in communion with him, Adam and Eve would enjoy an intimate friendship with God in the paradise that he had created for them.

CREATION IS MADE FOR MAN

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gn 1: 1)

These opening verses from the Book of Genesis relate God's great work of creation. We see that the universe was formless and void in the beginning, that God brought all creation into being by the power of his Word.

The six days that follow are divided into two corresponding groups of three days. Throughout Scripture, the number three is used to denote perfection or completeness. Here, the Sacred Author uses the number three to signify the perfection of God's creation.

In the first set of three days, God gave shape to the world, overcoming its formlessness and creating the forms that would sustain life.

- ❖ On the first day, God created light and separated it from the darkness, calling one "day" and the other "night." (Gn 1: 3-5)
- ❖ On the second day, he separated the waters, forming the "sky" and the "sea." (Gn 1: 6-8)
- ❖ On the third day, he created "dry land" and gave life to the "plants and vegetation." (Gn 1: 9-13)

During the next set of three days, God filled the world with the life that will rule over the forms that he has created.

- ❖ On the fourth day, God created the "sun and moon" to rule over the "day and night." (Gn 1: 14-19)
- ❖ On the fifth day, he called forth "birds and fish" to rule over "sky and sea." (Gn 1: 20-23)
- ❖ On the sixth day, he created "animals" to rule over the "dry land." (Gn 1: 24-25)

By dividing the act of creation into these two corresponding groups of three-day periods, the creation story is telling us that the act of creation was complete and perfect. However, at this point in Scripture, the purpose of God's creation had not yet been revealed. Finally, God added one last creature to his new world.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gn 1: 26-27)

By creating Adam and Eve, and placing them over his creation, God was not only creating caretakers or stewards for his new world. Instead, God made man and woman in his "own image," endowing them with the ability to understand, to make choices, and to love. Created in communion with him, Adam and Eve would enjoy an intimate friendship with God in the paradise that he had created for them. The world had been created for mankind, and mankind had been created for God.

The *imago Dei* consists in man's fundamental orientation to God, which is the basis of human dignity and of the inalienable rights of the human person. Because every human being is an image of God, he cannot be made subservient to any this-worldly system or finality. His sovereignty within the cosmos, his capacity for social existence, and his knowledge and love of the Creator—all are rooted in man's being made in the image of God.⁷

WE WERE MADE FOR COMMUNION WITH GOD

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. (CCC 1)

What does Scripture mean when it says that we were made in the "image and likeness" of God? When reading Scripture, it is often best to understand the meaning of a particular word or phrase by looking to



Paradise by Cranach the Elder.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we, too, are children of God made in his "image and likeness." B

other instances of its use in the text. In this case, we next see the term “image and likeness” used to describe Adam becoming the father of Seth “in his own likeness, after his image.”⁸

Just as Seth had received his biological nature from his father, Adam shared in the nature of his heavenly Father. As human beings, we are unique in possessing intelligence, free will, and the capacity to love. Above all, we possess the ability to know God and to understand the purpose of our existence. These gifts enable us to love God and to follow his plan for our lives, and thus fulfill our purpose of entering into communion with him.

There is a second significance in the use of the term “image and likeness.” It denotes the relationship between a father and a son. Unlike the birds of the air or the fish of the sea, Adam was a beloved son of the Father. As descendants of Adam and Eve, we, too, are children of God made in his “image and likeness.”

Created in the image of God, human beings are by nature bodily and spiritual, men and women made for one another, persons oriented towards communion with God and with one another, wounded by sin and in need of salvation, and destined to be conformed to Christ, the perfect image of the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

GOD PREPARES HIS PEOPLE FOR THE CHURCH

This “family of God” is gradually formed and takes shape during the stages of human history, in keeping with the Father’s plan. In fact, “already present in figure at the beginning of the world, this Church was prepared in marvelous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and the Old Advance.”¹⁰ (CCC 759)

From the beginning of creation, God desired to gather all mankind into communion with himself. Adam and Eve had been created in communion with God, but they lost this gift when they disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What follows this infamous act in Scripture is the story of God’s efforts to restore the original communion for which mankind had been created. The biblical record of how God’s plan of redemption in Christ unfolded is called *salvation history*.



God Presents Eve to Adam (detail from *Garden of Earthly Delights*) by Bosch. As originally designed by God, creation was a setting where man and woman could know God and live in his presence.

Beginning in the first books of the Old Testament, we read how God established covenants with his people and revealed his *moral law*, preparing the world for the sending of his Son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, we see how these preparations come to fruition in the Person and life of Christ and in the Church he established.

One way of following the events of salvation history is to see it as a series of covenants between God and man. In fact, the idea of *covenant* is a central theme throughout the entire Bible. But what exactly is a covenant? A covenant is a solemn agreement between God and people—an agreement that involves mutual commitments and promises.

Throughout salvation history, God made use of covenants to unite himself to his people. By examining God’s covenants with Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David, we will see how God prepared his people for the New and Everlasting Covenant in Christ Jesus.

Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view of Christ, the Redeemer “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” All the elect, before time began, the Father “foreknew and predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren.” He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. (*Lumen Gentium* 2)