

CREATION OF ALL THAT IS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

(C 279-421, USC Chs. 5-6)

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

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

(Nicene Creed)

In this article we will look at:

- Creation and evolution
- Creation of angels and fallen angels
- Creation of man and woman
- Mystery of evil and suffering
- The Fall – original sin

Creator of heaven and earth (C 279-301, USC p.53)

The *U.S. Catechism* tells us that catechesis on creation is of major importance for it answers two key questions: (1) where we came from, and (2) where we are going. As we search for meaning, these two questions are very important (p.53).

God did not need to create the world. He was perfectly complete without it. God freely created our vast, majestic, and beautiful universe out of love. God also created the world out of nothing. He needed no pre-existing materials to do his marvelous work. We humans are here to enjoy God's truth, goodness and beauty. God's plan is that we should enjoy eternity in perfect union with him.

Creation spirituality leads us closer to our Creator as we contemplate the beauty and majesty of the universe.

Creation and evolution (C 283-286, USC pp 57-58)

The German astrophysicist, Wernher von Braun, once said: *"Through science, man strives to learn more of the mysteries of creation. Through religion, he seeks to know the Creator."* Catholics can believe that the human body evolved from lower forms of life – all part of God's plan to form the world from the dust of the earth. But we do not believe that the soul evolved from matter. We believe that God breathes a soul into every person at the moment of conception (Gen 2:7). The *U.S. Catechism* states: *"Christian faith does not require the acceptance of any particular*

theory of evolution, nor does it forbid it, provided that the particular theory....does not deny....that God creates each human soul directly to share immortal life with him" (p.60).

Providence (C 302-308, USC p.63). "Providence" is the term used to describe the way God lovingly and mysteriously acts in creation to move it towards its final destination. (See Mt 6:25-30 for a beautiful description of God's providential care of creation. See also USC for examples of God's providence at work in the lives of the late St. Pope John Paul II and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta.)

Pause: Do you take time to contemplate the beauty of creation? Does it bother you to believe that we may have evolved from lower forms of life?

Angels – invisible creation (C 328-336, USC p.54)

Another fascinating aspect of the creation story is the reality that we believe exists beyond our senses. The *Nicene Creed* tells us that God is the "Maker of all that is visible and invisible." Angels (from a Greek word meaning "messenger") are a part of God's invisible creation. The work or ministry of angels is described throughout the pages of Scripture. An angel prevented Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac (Gen 22:11). An angel announced to Mary that she was chosen to be mother of the Messiah (Lk 1:26-38). An angel comforted Jesus in Gethsemane (Lk 22:43).

Angels were present at Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension. Mt 18:10 says that each of us has been given an angel to protect and guide us here on earth. The *Catechism* (330) tells us that angels are spiritual beings with intelligence and will. Angels glorify God and work for our salvation. It is a wonderful and important spiritual practice to frequently seek the guidance and protection of our guardian angel.

Pause: Do you have a special angel story? Do you believe in guardian angels? Do you have a relationship with your guardian angel?

Demons – fallen angels

Even though God created all angels perfectly good and loving, some angels used their free will to rebel against God (C 392). They were driven out of heaven forever and into hell. Their leader is called Satan (which means “accuser”) and the other fallen angels are called devils or demons. We might wonder if it is unfair of God to allow fallen angels to suffer in hell forever. Where is God’s mercy? The Church would respond that Satan and his fallen angels, with their great intelligence, fully realized the possible consequences of their actions. The *Catechism* (393) states: “*It is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy that makes the angels’ sin unforgivable.*” Why God allows Satan and other fallen angels to tempt us and attack us is a mystery. But if Jesus was not protected from the temptations of Satan, neither should we, his disciples, expect to be spared from Satan’s seductive influence. In battling Satan and all forms of evil in our world, we are participating in Jesus’ battle against these forces.

When it comes to this piece of Christian belief and practice, we need to be aware of two things. First, the existence of Satan. Scripture tells us that he is the “most cunning” of God’s creatures (Gen 3:1), that he is the “father of lies” (Jn 8:44), that he sometimes comes to us as an “angel of the light” (2Cor 10:14). Satan’s purpose is our destruction. The second thing we need to be aware of is that Satan cannot pull us away from God without our cooperation. If we keep our eyes on Jesus and put on the “armor of God” (Eph 6:10-17), we can resist the temptations and attacks of Satan.

Pause: Do you believe in the existence of Satan, in an evil being that wants to destroy us and our relationships, especially our relationship with God? Why might people not believe in the existence of Satan?

Creation of man and woman (C 355-384, USC pp 67-68)

God created man in his image...male and female He created them. (Gen 1:27)

In figurative and symbolic language, scripture describes God creating the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and placing them in Paradise. They were created for friendship with God and in harmony with creation. (USC p.37)

Human beings are the crown of God’s visible creation because we are created “in the image and likeness of God.” What does this mean? It means that we have capabilities that go beyond all other creatures. We have self-awareness and self-knowledge. We alone are capable of knowing God and freely choosing to love him with our whole being. This is why God created us – to know and love and serve him here on earth and to enjoy him forever in heaven.

Physical and spiritual beings (C 362-368). At the time of our conception, the combined DNA of our human parents created our *physical body*. At the same moment, God breathed a *soul* into us, a spiritual principle that animates our whole being and gives us the capacity to know and love God. Our soul is immortal and completely united to our body, forming a single human nature.

Created for Love (C 372). Preface Three of the *Marriage Ritual* (1973 translation) states: “*Love is our origin, love is our constant calling, love is our final fulfillment in heaven.*” God created us for friendship with him and to form a loving community with other men and women. God created the woman because “it was not good for the man to be alone.” Man and woman were **created equal** and intended to be helpmates to each other in the journey of life. They were not created to compete with each other but to form a **loving partnership**. When men and women live in loving community, they reflect the communal life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Stewards of creation (C 358,373). Creation is God’s gift to us (C 358). Our call is to enjoy and appreciate this gift of God and allow it to draw us closer to our Creator. In the creation story, the man and woman are given “*dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth*” (Gen 1:28). *Dominion* over the earth does not mean that we are to use the earth selfishly and destructively. Rather, it means that we are to be **good stewards** of God’s creation. God is counting on us to protect and use the earth’s resources wisely and to share them especially with the poor and the hungry. In its pastoral letter, *Faithful Citizenship*, the United Conference of Bishops states: “*We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of God’s creation. Care for the earth is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people..... We have a moral obligation to protect the planet on which we live... we should work for a world in which people respect*

and protect all of creation and seek to live simply in harmony with it for the sake of future generations.” (See also Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si – On Care for our Common Home.*)

Pause: How important to you is protecting the environment? Should parishes be doing more in this area?

The reality of evil (C 309-314, USC pp 56-57)

The *Catechism* speaks of *two* kinds of evil: physical and moral. *Physical evil* has to do with physical and mental diseases and the destructive forces of nature, e.g., hurricanes, tsunamis, etc. *Moral evil* refers to sin – the way we misuse our freedom to bring evil into our world. When God created us, he gave us free will so that we could *freely* choose to love him and follow his ways. By the same token, we can choose to reject God and his ways thereby bringing *moral evil* into the world. There is no mystery here – only the perplexity of why humans choose self over God.

On the other hand, *physical evil* is a great mystery – the mystery of why an all-good and all-powerful God would allow disease and the destructive forces of nature to sometimes wreak havoc on our lives. As creation moves towards its final state of perfection, God allows physical evil to coexist alongside physical good (C 310-311). Why is this?

The *Catechism* (309) tells us that there is no easy answer to this question. But we do know that a full and active involvement in our Christian faith will help us immensely, not only to cope with evil and suffering, but also even grow as we deal with them, helping us to become more like Christ who suffered so much at the hands of sinful humanity.

While we do not understand why God permits evil and suffering, we do know that he wishes to draw good out of them. For example, when Joseph in the Book of Genesis met his brothers who sold him into slavery, he said to them: “*It was not you who sent me here. It was God.... You meant evil for me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive*” (Gen 45:4-8). Joseph’s *faith perspective* helped him to see the hand of God bringing good out of intended evil. This is also our challenge. We also know that from the greatest moral evil ever (the Crucifixion of Jesus) came the greatest good, namely, the salvation of humanity. Because of

Jesus’ Resurrection, Christians believe that the forces of good will eventually triumph over the forces of evil. As creation journeys towards its final destination and perfection, our challenge is to trust in God’s providential care for us, to trust that God knows what he is doing. Our challenge is to develop a faith perspective that will help us to embrace the wisdom found in this poem:

The Weaver

*My life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors
he worketh steadily.
Oft times He weaveth sorrow
and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
and I, the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
and the shuttles cease to fly,
shall God unroll the canvas
and explain the reason why
the dark threads are as needful
in the Weaver’s skillful hand
as the threads of gold and silver
in the pattern He has planned.*

(Author Unknown)

Finally, we should remember that Satan always wants to use our experience of evil and suffering to separate us from God. God wants to use them to draw us closer to him.

Pause: When you witness great suffering or evil in the world or in your life, what helps you to cope with it and to make sense out of it? What helps you to move through the tough times? Can you recall a bad experience that helped you become a better person?

The Fall – original sin (C 385-421, USC pp 68-70)

“By one man’s disobedience, many (that is all) were made sinners.” (Rom 5:12)

We have seen how God created the world good and created the man and the woman very good. We might say that prior to the fall, “all was rosy” in the garden of Paradise. Then as we move to chapter 3 of Genesis, we read the sad account of how Adam and Eve used their free will to disobey God’s command to not eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden (Gen 2:15-17). The tree of knowledge of good

and evil symbolizes the limits human beings have as creatures. We are not free to do as we like.

We do not need to believe that Genesis is a historical account of how sin entered the world. The *Catechism* (309) states: “*The account of the Fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man.*”

The purpose of the author was not to give us an eyewitness account of *how* sin entered the world, but rather to tell us that sin or moral evil entered the visible world when our first parents used their gift of free will to disobey their creator. Evil entered the unseen world when some angels rebelled against God.

Adam and Eve’s sin of disobedience had dreadful consequences for them personally but also for all of humanity. These are:

- The harmonious relationship which existed between God and them is destroyed. They now fear God and hide from him (Gen 3:8).
- The loving relationship between the man and the woman is damaged. There is tension as they refuse to take responsibility for their sin. The “blame game” sets in (Gen 3:11-13).
- The *inner* harmony which the man and the woman enjoyed prior to the fall is shattered. They are ashamed of their bodies and sexuality. They cover themselves with fig leaves (Gen 3:7). The body and soul, which previously enjoyed a peaceful relationship, now war against each other. St. Paul frequently speaks about the conflict between body (flesh) and soul (spirit) in his writings (e.g., Rom 7:14 – 8:13).
- The peaceful relationship with creation is shattered (Rom 8:13-23). Creation and nature become a hostile environment. Henceforth, the woman will experience pain in childbirth and work will be a burden for the man (Gen 3:16-19).
- Finally, because of original sin, suffering and death enter the world: “*You are dust and to dust you shall return*” (Gen 3:19).

In short, we might say that the *harmony* that God intended for all of his creation was badly damaged by Adam and Eve’s sin. Gen 3 ends with the expulsion

of Adam and Eve from the Garden. But before that, there is a ray of hope announced in Gen 3:15, often called the *Protoevangelium* (the first good news). The offspring of a woman of our race would strike at the head of Satan and ultimately defeat him. Many of the early Church Fathers saw the woman mentioned in Gen 3:15 as Mary, the “new Eve” who would give birth to the new Adam—Jesus—who would offer salvation to a fallen humanity. The image of the Lady of Guadalupe has Mary standing on the head of Satan.

Pause: What spoke to you most in the section that we have just read? Why?

Born with original sin, born with a wounded human nature

“Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called ‘original sin.’” (C 417)

The phrase “original sin” was coined by St. Augustine in the fifth century – a reality which Paul speaks about in Rom 5:12-21. It is called original sin because it is the sin that occurred at the origins of the human race. The Church teaches that the sin of Adam and Eve had consequences for all of humanity. *This is a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend.* A partial answer lies in the fact that the whole human race is connected. “*Because of the unity of the human race, everyone is affected by the sin of our first parents*” (USC p.70). Just as a physical defect in a parent’s DNA can be transmitted to a child, so did Adam and Eve transmit to their descendants a *spiritual defect*.

What is the nature of this spiritual defect, or what is original sin? It means that each of us is born with a human nature that has a certain *inclination towards sin*. This is often called “concupiscence” (a desire to go off the correct moral path). Original sin means that our natural powers for relating to God and choosing good have been weakened, and our emotions and passions are disordered. We live with a certain resistance to the Holy Spirit.

As a result of original sin, we find ourselves engaged in a spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. Paul shares with us his own struggle in this area

in Rom 7:14-25 where he talks about his “failure to do the good he wants to do and how he finds himself doing the evil he hates.” As we ponder the impact of original sin on us, we may ask: Doesn’t the Church teach that Baptism removes original sin from our soul? Responding to this question, Fr. McBride in his *College Catechism* (p.63) writes: “*The Church, following the development of St. Augustine on this matter, teaches that we are born good, but flawed, because we are deprived of the gifts of original holiness and justice. Hence there is need to be born again of water and the Holy Spirit in Baptism. The sacrament removes the deprivation caused by original sin and introduces us to the life of God in grace. But Baptism does not erase the damage due to original sin. That is why we speak of the traces or wounds of the primal sin that remain. We require growth in spirituality and moral virtues to be liberated from the damage.*”

As we who are baptized struggle with our own selfish, greedy, revengeful and lusty tendencies and with our resistance to the Spirit, we quickly see how the traces of original sin remain within us. But we also know then that when we are faithful to prayer and the sacraments, we experience an ability to push back again and often achieve victory over our sinful tendencies.

The gift outweighs the Fall

In Rom 5:12-21, Paul states that “Adam prefigured the One to come” and that the gift of grace and salvation brought by Jesus “considerably outweighs the Fall.” During the Easter Vigil *Exultet*, we sing, “*O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer.*” In fact, we can say that Jesus by his life, death and Resurrection, has won the battle against sin and evil. We just need to decide which side we are on. In our next two articles, we will focus on Jesus, his ministry, death and Resurrection.

Pause: The Church’s doctrine on original sin holds that while we are born loved by God, we are also born flawed or with a tendency towards sin. Do you find this doctrine easy or hard to believe? What helps you to keep pushing back against your sinful or ungodly tendencies?

Suggested action

Take time to appreciate the beauty and majesty of God’s creation. Reflect on how you and others are created in God’s image. Contemplate on the importance of staying faithful to prayer and the sacraments as we seek to do better with our sinful tendencies.

Meditation

*Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere
to give you thanks.
All things are of your making,
all times and seasons obey your laws.
But you chose to create man and woman
in your own image,
setting them over the whole world in all its wonder.
You made us stewards of creation,
to praise you day by day
for the marvels of your wisdom and power,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
we praise you, Lord, with all the angels
in their song of joy.*

(Creation Preface, Sunday Missal)

Fr. Eamon Tobin ©
Ascension Catholic Church
Melbourne, FL
tobin2@live.com