The Creation

CHAPTER 2

Brother Sun, Sister Moon

Most High, Omnipotent, Good Lord, yours be the praises, the glory, and the honor and every blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong and no one is worthy to mention you.

May you be praised, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially brother sun, of whom is the day, and you enlighten us through him. And he is beautiful and radiant with a great splendor, of You, Most High, does he convey the meaning.

May you be praised, my Lord, for sister moon and the stars in heaven. You have made them clear and precious and beautiful. May you be praised, my Lord, for brother wind, and for the air and the clouds and the clear weather and every weather, through which to all your creatures you give sustenance.

May you be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive for the sake of your love and endure infirmity and tribulation. Blessed those who endure them in peace, because by you, Most High, will they be crowned.

~ *St. Francis of Assisi*

1. How do we know that God created the world?

We know this because of our belief in his revelation. We also can come to know this through reason. "Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of 'converging and convincing arguments' which allow us to attain certainty about the truth.

"These 'ways' of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world and the human person" (*Catechism*, 31; cf. also 33-35).

From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*...

Sharing in God's Goodness

A. What is the link between creation and salvation?

Creation is the foundation of "all God's saving plans," the "beginning of the history of salvation"[1] 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.[2] (*Catechism*, 280)

B. Why is our teaching on creation so important?

Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves:[3] "Where do we come from?" "Where are we going?" "What is our origin?" "What is our end?" "Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?" The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions. (*Catechism*, 282)

C. Is there a purpose for creation?

We believe that God created the world according to his wisdom.[4] It is not the product of any necessity whatever, nor of blind fate or chance. We believe that it proceeds from God's free will; he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom and goodness: "For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."[5] Therefore the Psalmist exclaims, "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all"; and "The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made."[6] (*Catechism*, 295)

[1] *GCD* 51. / [2] Gen 1:1; cf. Rom 8:18-23. / [3] Cf. *NA* 2. / [4] Cf. Wis 9:9. / [5] Rev 4:11. / [6] Ps 104:24; 145:9.

2. What is revelation?

Revelation is God's communication of himself to us.

3. How is God's revelation made available to us?

Revelation is communicated to us through Scripture and tradition. "Hence there exist a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end" (*DV*, 9). Both make present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own "always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

4. How should we respond to revelation?

We should respond to God's offer of friendship with living faith. By active faith, we accept God's love and offer our love in return. Through this dynamic faith we believe in God's word, as it is found in the Bible, and the teachings and practices of the Church.

5. What does revelation tell us about creation?

The first eleven chapters of Genesis teach us that:

a) God created, and continues to create, the world and human beings. He did this freely and directly, without help.

b) God gave being to that which in no way possessed it; God called it into existence out of nothing.

c) God chooses human beings to be his friends.

d) This friendship is broken by sin.

6. Did creation happen in six days?

The six days of creation in Genesis are not to be taken literally. The story is a literary device to help the audience more easily understand that there is only one God, who is Father and creator of all that is.

7. What is divine providence?

"Creation has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete from the hands of the Creator. The universe was created 'in a state of journeying' (*in statu viae*) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call 'divine providence' the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection" (*Catechism*, 302). "I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you'" (Is 41:13). "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20).

8. Who are the angels?

Angels are spiritual "messengers" for God. Their existence reminds us that there is more to creation than what we see, feel, hear, or taste (cf. 2 Sam 14:17; 2 Kings 19:35; Book of Revelation). Church teachings about the existence of angels may be found in the documents of the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council.

9. Who are the fallen angels?

Also known as demons, devils, and Satan, they are angels that have rejected God of their own free wills. The story of the rebellious angels is in Revelation (12:7-9) and Isaiah (14:12ff.). Jesus said, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning" (Lk 10:18).

10. Can fallen angels affect us?

They may try to reach us to call us to evil. The Church reminds us of St. Peter's words, "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith" (1 Pet 5:8-9).

11. What does revelation teach about the creation of humans?

We learn that God created us as material and spiritual people. The Genesis story teaches that God took clay and breathed into it the breath of life. Therefore, we are body and soul, and are created in the image of God.

12. What is the purpose of my spiritual nature?

In my spiritual nature I am free, intelligent, and called to responsibility. "For by his interior qualities he outstrips the whole sum of mere things. He attains to these inward

depths whenever he enters into his own heart.... Man judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind" (*GS*, 14, 15).

13. What is the purpose of my physical nature?

Through our bodies each of us is linked with material creation and bears a responsibility for it. We are called to participate with God in bringing order to the earth. "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). We are summoned to enjoy the world and care for it with love. Because of Christ's resurrection, our bodies will also rise from the dead. "I believe...in the resurrection of the body" (Apostles' Creed).

14. In what ways are we "images" of God?

We image God in five ways:

a) by our ability to know the truth;

b) by our capacity for choosing the good;

c) by our freedom to act in accordance with truth and goodness;

d) by our human dignity, which is God's gift; and

e) by being a person in communion—which means being oriented to love and care for others.

15. How do scientific theories of evolution relate to the Bible's creation story and church teaching?

Scientific investigation and knowledge speak of the process whereby lower forms of life evolved into higher ones. The Bible teaches the reason behind creation—God's power and continuing presence and purpose.

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" (*Catechism*, 366). In this special act, we are made in God's image and likeness. There is no necessary contradiction between Catholic biblical teaching and scientific evolution. An old adage says, "The Bible is not a book of science. It does not teach us how the heavens go. Rather, it teaches us how to go to heaven."

16. What is grace?

Grace is God's gift of his divine love and life for us, especially through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Grace describes the Spirit's actions, which result in the practice of Christian virtues.

17. How does the Bible speak of grace?

Scripture speaks of grace as having the following properties:

a) Forgiveness: By grace, God forgives us our sins.

b) Favor: Grace is genuinely a free gift or favor of God.

c) Enabler: Grace causes us to love as Christ did, and to witness to him by practicing Christian virtues.

18. What is the difference between "sanctifying" and "actual" grace?

Sanctifying grace is the relationship of love God establishes with human beings through his Spirit, dwelling in our hearts. Actual, or helping, grace refers to the help that the Spirit gives us to perform acts of good will for others.

We are not to think of grace as divided, however, for it is the one Spirit who is helping us and maintaining us in love relationships.

19. What is supernatural life?

Supernatural life is the divine love and life of the Lord, graciously shared with us.

20. What is the context for understanding sin?

The reality of sin, especially original sin, is clear only in the light of divine revelation. Apart from this, sin may seem to be only a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the result of an inadequate social structure. Revelation shows us that sin is an abuse of the freedom God gave us. The saving work of Jesus finally showed us how real and serious sin is, and how it destroys us.

21. What is original sin?

"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.*[7] Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents"[8] (*Catechism*, 390).

"Original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence'" (*Catechism*, 405).

22. How does one begin to sin?

We sin when we deliberately refuse God's offer of love and life. This is expressed when we act on our human power alone, rejecting God's power. By sin and disobedience, we repudiate God's loving plan for us. By faith and obedience, we surrender to God's love and way of living.

23. What effect does sin have on us as individuals?

Sin causes disharmony within us, resulting in a break in the peace and unity that should exist between our bodies and our souls. We feel divided, naked, and ashamed. Having lost our harmonious relationship with God, we lose the secure relationship with ourselves.

"Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves." Adam said to God, "I was afraid because I was naked." To this God asked, "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen 3:7, 10, 11).

24. How does sin affect our relationships with our loved ones?

God made us to be concerned about other people and to be one with them. Sin destroys our harmonious relationships with other human beings. "The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry?'...Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen 4:6, 8).

25. What is God's response to human sinfulness?

He responds with signs of love and forgiveness and a plan for our salvation. Adam and Eve were told that the head of the serpent of evil will be crushed by a savior (cf. Gen 3:15). In the call of Abraham, the Father begins a process of salvation that will continue in the person and work of Jesus.

Living this Message

The Catholic Church, while leaving to science many details about the history of life on earth, proclaims that by the light of reason the human intellect can readily and clearly discern purpose and design in the natural world, including the world of living things.

Evolution in the sense of common ancestry might be true, but evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense—an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection—is not. Any system of thought that denies or seeks to explain away the overwhelming evidence for design in biology is ideology, not science.

Cardinal Christoph Schonborn emphasizes this point by quoting Pope Benedict XVI, "We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."

Discuss this Message

When faced with issues that address both religion and science, what should we keep in mind?

Read More about this Message

Catechism for Adults: Chapter 5, "I Believe in God," pages 53 – 56.

[7] Cf. *GS* 13 § 1. / [8] Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1513; Pius XII: DS 3897; Paul VI: AAS 58 (1966), 654.