

Genesis

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Catholic Scripture Study International

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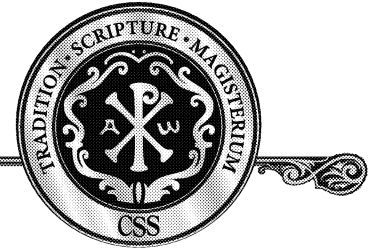
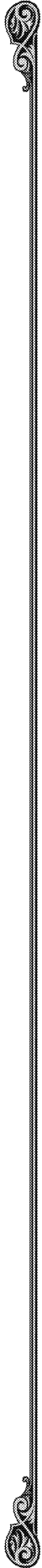


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Cover Art



The Creation of Adam

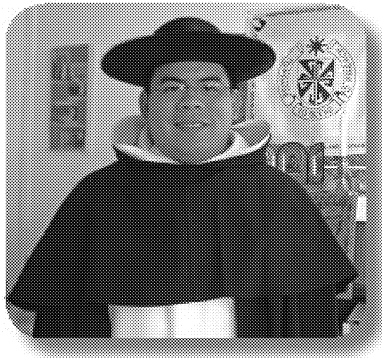
Victorian glass from the west window of St. Edmundsbury Cathedral located in Suffolk, England.

Photo courtesy of:
Friar Lawrence Lew, O.P.

Brother Lawrence is a son of the English Province of the Order of Friar Preachers (Dominicans). Much like Abraham, he has been a pilgrim and wayfarer in this world: he was born in Malaysia but has lived in the USA, Singapore, the UK and the Philippines. As a Dominican Friar, he continues to journey through life as a pilgrim seeking Truth.

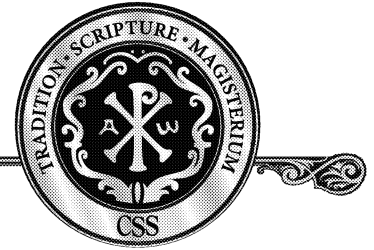
Brother Lawrence has been blessed with the ability to see beauty everywhere as illustrated by his gallery of photos that can be viewed online at www.flickr.com.

He also has a very enlightening blog online entitled , "Fruit of Contemplation." You can visit his blog site at <http://contemplare.blogspot.com>.



Brother Lawrence asked nothing for the privilege of using his image only that we consider a donation to his order. We were happy to do so and hope that you will visit him online to see some of his many other photos of Christian art and architecture from around the world.

Thank you, Brother Lawrence!



Memory Verses

Lesson 1: Gen 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Lesson 2: Gen. 2:7

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Lesson 3: Gen 3:15

[The LORD God said to the serpent] “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Lesson 4: Gen 4:7

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

Lesson 5: Gen 9:8-10

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.

Lesson 6: Gen 10:32

These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Lesson 7: Gen 12:2-3

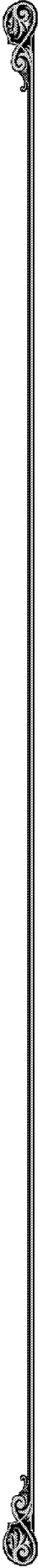
And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”

Lesson 8: Gen 14:18

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.

Lesson 9: Gen 15:13

Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years.



Lesson 10: Gen 17:7

And I will establish my covenant between me and you [Abraham] and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.

Lesson 11: Gen 19:29

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

Lesson 12: Gen 21:12

But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named.

Lesson 13: Gen 22:15-18

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16* and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Lesson 14: Gen 24:48

Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son.

Lesson 15: Gen 25:23

And the LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.”

Lesson 16: Gen 28:12-14

And he [Jacob] dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it* and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves.

Lesson 17: Gen 30:22

Then God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb.

Lesson 18: Gen 31:24

But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, “Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad.”

Lesson 19: Gen 32:28

Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, * for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Lesson 20: Gen 34:1-2

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land; 2 and when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humbled her.

Lesson 21: Gen 35:22-25

... Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali.

Lesson 22: Gen 37:28

Then Midianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver.

Lesson 23: Gen 38:9-10

But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. 10 And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also.

Lesson 24: Gen 41:41

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

Lesson 25: Gen 43:26

When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground.

Lesson 26: Gen 45:9

Make haste and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry;

Lesson 27: Gen 47:11

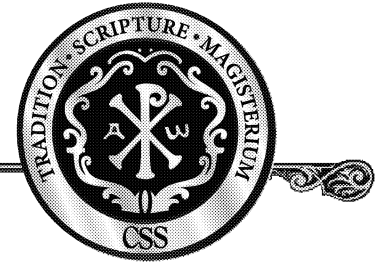
Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

Lesson 28: Gen 50:19-20

But Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

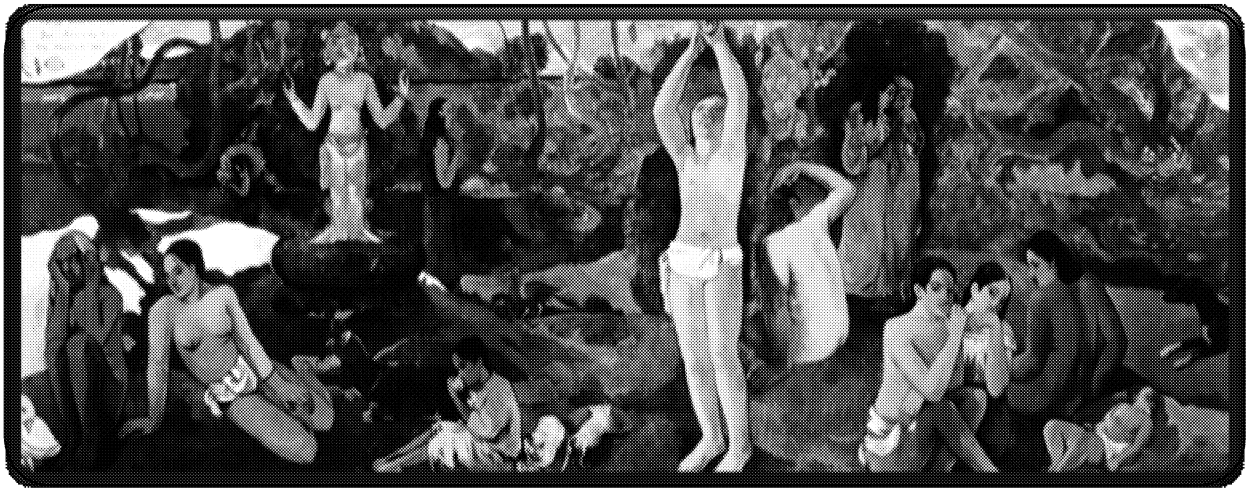
Genesis

Introduction



Origin, Nature, and Destiny

From the beginning of time, man has looked up to the stars and wondered: Who are we? Where do we come from? Are we important? Are we alone in the universe? Is there meaning to our existence? What happens when we die? In 1897 the French painter Paul Gauguin finished an enormous painting entitled, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* To make sure the viewer would know the title of his work, he painted the words in the upper left corner of the canvas. Gauguin's work of art contained human figures asking questions about their destiny, and he painted on it a silly white bird that represents the futility of language. The response in Gauguin's composition to those three big questions is only *silence: There is no answer.*




Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?
Paul Gauguin, 1897–1898
© Paul Gauguin / Visipix.com

Gauguin said his painting was a philosophical statement comparable to the Gospel, but in reality it was a statement of meaninglessness and absurdity. Gauguin was a modern man, a skeptic, and his “gospel” suggested that there was no purpose to life, no hope for mankind. From his perspective, we are alone in the universe; there is no answer to these big questions; and life will end merely in a deafening silence. With this outlook on life, it is not surprising that after Gauguin completed his statement of despair on canvas, he stuffed himself with arsenic to end his life. It transpired, though, that he ate too much, vomited, and was doomed to continue living.

It may also come as no surprise that Gauguin was a long-time sufferer of depression and alcoholism. Sadly, many people in our time share his outlook and, believing life to be totally devoid of meaning and hope, suffer in the same way. Like Gauguin, these people are haunted by those fundamental questions, and seek an explanation that provides the answer to their origin, nature, and destiny.

Genesis is an ancient book, but it is written for modern times. It contains the answers to the big questions that mankind asks in every age. In this first book of the Bible, we discover that God has not only anticipated our questions from the very beginning; he has revealed that there *is* indeed meaning, there is hope, and that we *can* know where we come from, who we are, what happens when we die; and we can even begin to realize our destiny. In Genesis we discover that the answers to all these questions are not to be found in *something*, but in *someone*. We discover that we are not alone in the universe; that there is someone outside our world whose image and likeness we alone bear. When we come to know this *other* as our



Creator, we are able to define ourselves in relation to him. The revelation of God in Genesis is extremely important to our modern world because by understanding where we come from, who we are, and where we are bound, we encounter fertile soil for the roots of our questioning souls.

Unlike false and pagan gods, the God of Genesis desires to be known. He loves his creation and has a passionate love for the creature he made in his own image—mankind. God stoops to speak to us, to save us, to reveal himself to us so that we can know and love him. God wants to draw us to himself and even to give us a share in his own divine nature. He reveals himself so that we may know and love him as *Father*.

That is what Genesis is. It is the beginning of this revelation from God. In it, God tells us things we could never know with only our five senses. Science can devise theories about how things began, what they are made of, and the manner in which they work. But science can never go back and observe or recreate the beginning of all things. Science can sometimes tell us the *how*, but it cannot tell us the *why*.

In Genesis we have the words of God himself giving us the answers we seek. He tells us the *how* and the *why*. The masterpiece of God's revelation to man is not like the Gauguin's painting. God's words are creative, and his story is played out as the history of the created world. God is a true artist, and his revelation is poetry for the soul—dripping with life and hope and truth and joy.

Title and Purpose

Three biblical books open with the words “in the beginning”—*Genesis*, the *Gospel of John*, and the *First Letter of John*—and each refers to a different time frame. *Genesis* refers to the beginning of the physical universe; *St. John's Gospel* to eternity before the world began; and *St. John's First Epistle* to the eternal existence of God's creative Word—both before creation and within space and time—as he is now seen and known, in the person of Jesus Christ.


From John's Gospel we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). God was already pre-existing before the world began, and the Word—Jesus Christ who became flesh and dwelt among us—was God, i.e., as to his nature and being, he was eternal and divine.

So Genesis begins by making a statement about God and the universe. The infinite God existed eternally before the world was created. The infinite God is not part of the physical creation or locked inside the space-time continuum. God is outside of his creation, separate from it, just as a painter is the creator of his work but exists outside of it and is separate from it. God created the universe *ex nihilo*—out of nothing. He called it into being by his word, his will, and his power.

Before the beginning of the world God existed as a Trinity. The three persons of the Trinity created the world for their pleasure. The physical world—and all that is not God—was created and had a beginning. But God has no beginning. He is eternal. Try as you will, you will never wrap your finite mind around that infinite mystery. There was never a time that God was not; but there *was* a time when the world was not, and God called it into being.

So we are given much information in the first verses of Genesis, the book of beginnings. God begins to tell us about himself, his creation, and Mankind. Over the centuries future revelations from God will explain and expand upon the truths revealed in these first verses because the Bible is a whole with all the various writings forming a continuity of unity. In Genesis we begin with a garden; in the last book of Revelation at the culmination of time, we dwell in a city. In the beginning we are naked; in the end we are clothed with royal garments. In Genesis we were driven from paradise, but in Revelation we enter paradise forever. The beginning and the end call back and forth to each other so that we can understand the whole epic of salvation history. God has a plan and history is the fulfillment of that plan. You can divide the history into two words: “*His story*.” Everything will be consummated on the Last Day.

The word *genesis* simply means *beginning*, which is how the Book of Genesis got its name: because its very first words are *in the beginning* (in Hebrew, *bereshith*), and because Genesis is filled with beginnings, one right after another. First, we learn about *before* the beginning—God existed and created something from nothing; second, we learn about the beginning of the physical universe; then about the beginning of life and the beginning of Man made in the image of God. This is followed by another beginning—sin entered



this paradise and the fall took place. Then came the first promise of restoration and the beginning of salvation history.

In Genesis we see the first sacrifice to cover guilty mankind when animal skins were provided as a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve. We see the beginning of the family, and the first murder. We then discover the new beginning of humanity with Noah, the beginning of nations and differing languages, and the beginning of God's redemption through the seed of one man—Abraham, the father of faith.

We also find in Genesis the beginning of the covenantal relationship between God and Man with the first three major covenants—with Adam, with Noah, and with Abraham. How can we understand our existence and the rest of the Bible without this foundational and seminal revelation from God? In Genesis, he has revealed divine truth that we could never have discovered with microscopes.

Finally, we cannot discuss the purpose of Genesis without noting the importance of approaching the text with the understanding that Genesis reveals the answers to *theological* questions about the origin, nature and destiny of man. As mentioned previously, we cannot look to science to answer questions of this type because that is not the intent or purpose of genuine scientific study. Science and Scripture both reveal truth when rightly studied; they are, however, distinct orders of knowledge: one reveals *scientific* truths about created, physical realities; the other reveals *theological* truths about the *uncreated, invisible* realities that give *meaning* to the physical. Therefore, we should not expect Genesis to provide us with scientific explanations for the existence and workings of the physical universe—that was not the intent of its divine author. In order to discover the truths revealed in Genesis, we must remember to ask the right questions.


Author and Date

Genesis is part of a larger work known as the *Pentateuch*, which comes from two Greek words meaning *five* and *scroll*; thus, *book composed of five scrolls*. In Hebrew it is known as *Torah*, meaning *the Law*. The Pentateuch consists of the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The question of authorship is not directed at Genesis alone, but at the entire Pentateuch. Even though the Book of Genesis does not reveal its author, all Jews and Christians from the earliest times unanimously attributed the writing of Genesis to Moses.

There is both external and internal evidence in support of Mosaic authorship. External evidence is based upon the fact that as far back as Jewish tradition can be traced, Moses is credited as the author of the Pentateuch and therefore of Genesis. The Fathers of the Church also maintained Mosaic authorship. Internal evidence comes from within Sacred Scripture: the Pentateuch, itself, affirms Moses as its author (Exodus 17:14, 24:4, 34:27, Numbers 33:1-2, Deuteronomy 31:9), as does Jesus, who refers to the first five books of the Bible as the “book of Moses” (Mark 12:26, Luke 24:27, John 5:46). However, unlike St. Paul's epistles, which begin by identifying St. Paul as the author in the opening lines, the individual book of Genesis contains no such internal witness or assertion of authorship.

There are two schools of thought regarding the authorship of Genesis: One, Moses wrote it; and two, Moses didn't write it and someone else did. Until the seventeenth century, Mosaic authorship was unquestioned. The scholars who today reject the authorship of Moses have not been able to come to any consensus on alternate theories. It is interesting to note that these are often the same scholars who dispute not only Paul's authorship of some of the New Testament books attributed to him, but also the authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John of the gospels credited to them. It has become popular in recent times to question everything that the ancients believed without question, as though we are two thousand years smarter than those brilliant patriarchs, prophets, and sages of the past. C. S. Lewis, a Christian apologist, referred to this way of thinking as “chronological snobbery,” and wisely observed that instead of rejecting ancient philosophies, we should admit the help of past ages in order to see our own age more clearly. He advocated letting the “breezes of the centuries” blow through our minds.

In the last century, it was popular to look within the Pentateuch for various source documents. The most popular of these approaches is called the “documentary theory.” It proposed that multiple documents were written by a series of unknown authors who were separated by many hundreds of years; these documents were then woven together by redactors (editors) at some later date to arrive at the finished product now known as the Pentateuch. According to this hypothesis, the variation in names



used for *God* throughout the Pentateuch suggests that the supposed documents originated from four different sources: “J” for the source who used *Yahweh* for the divine name; “E” for the source who used *Elohim* for the divine name; “P” for the source who was concerned chiefly with religious matters; and “D” for the source who added the end of Deuteronomy that details the death of Moses. Some but not all of the scholars who espouse this theory also deny the historicity of Genesis. However, this “documentary theory,” also known as the “JEPD theory,” is being abandoned by recent scholarship.

The Fathers of the Church, as well as Jesus and the apostles, all refer to Genesis as the work of Moses. So, while both Tradition and documented history do not definitively *prove* that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, their witness at the very least places the burden of proof on any challenger. To date, there has been no proof that Moses was *not* the author of the Pentateuch in the ancient sense; therefore, there is no convincing reason to abandon the theory of Mosaic authorship.

Although Genesis does not tell us who the author is, and Scripture never says specifically that Moses wrote Genesis, we are in good company to conclude that Moses is the author and editor of the materials, and that he, along with other possible secretaries or editors, was guided by the Holy Spirit to provide us today with the inerrant, infallible, and authoritative word of God contained in the Pentateuch. The reality is that the incredible internal consistency of Genesis is due to the fact that its chief author is God himself, who wrote it to reveal the beginning of his work in the world among Mankind. St. Theophilus of Antioch once wrote, “Moses... or rather, the Word of God, who used him as an instrument, said, ‘In the beginning God made heaven and earth.’”

Moses was raised in a royal family, presumably with the best education. He certainly would have been keen to record the history of his people. Until that time it was the practice in ancient cultures to pass on family history primarily through the art of storytelling, also called *oral tradition*. Moses gleaned that history from the stories he was told and possibly from some written documents as well. So, Genesis is the history he compiled of his people before his own time; Moses, however, actually lived in and wrote the contemporary histories contained in the remaining books of the Pentateuch—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. An editor, possibly Joshua, added the end of Deuteronomy which details the death of Moses himself. It should be noted that in recognizing later edits such as this, we in no way discredit Mosaic authorship. In ancient times, the rights of authorship were not treated as they are today; it was not uncommon for an editor to add to content without noting any change in the original authorship.

In response to questions about Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the Pontifical Biblical Commission stated on June 27, 1906 that Mosaic authorship does not “necessarily imply a production of the whole work of such a character as to impose the belief that each and every word was written by Moses’ own hand or was by him dictated to secretaries.” The Commission elaborated further:

A legitimate hypothesis [is] that he [Moses] conceived the work himself under the guidance of divine inspiration and then entrusted the writing of it to one or more persons, with the understanding that they reproduced his thoughts with fidelity and neither wrote nor omitted anything contrary to his will, and that finally the work composed after this fashion was approved by Moses, its principal and inspired author, and was published under his name. (*Pontifical Biblical Commission*, June 27, 1906)

The date when Genesis was written is unknown. Much of the material was passed on by oral tradition through generations. Because Abraham and his descendants must have been the primary source, we can establish the date of its writing between the time that Abraham lived (around the year 1850 BC), and the time that Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt (somewhere around 1250 BC). There were probably edits and finishing touches after that time.

General Outline

The structure of Genesis can be approached in one of two ways: according to its subject matter or according to its external form. The subject matter is presented in two basic sections: Primeval History (Genesis Chapters 1-11) and Patriarchal History (Genesis Chapters 12-50). Each section can be further subdivided by subject matter as follows:

I. Primeval History

- A. Cosmological creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:6)
- B. Anthropological creation account (Genesis 2:7-25)
- C. Fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-24)
- D. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-26)
- E. Descendants of Adam (Genesis 5:1-32)
- F. Wickedness of the World and the Flood (Genesis 6:1-9:29)
- G. Table of Nations (Genesis 10:1-32)
- H. Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)
- I. Genealogy of Abraham (Genesis 11:10-32)

II. Patriarchal History

- A. Abraham (Genesis 12:1-25:18)
- B. Isaac (Genesis 25:19-26:35)
- C. Jacob (Genesis 27:1-36:43)
- D. Joseph (Genesis 37:1-50:26)

The external form of Genesis is based upon divisions of the text into a framework of *generations* (in Hebrew, *tôledôth*). Each generation contains the phrase, “These are the generations of ...” and can be found in the following verses:

Genesis 2:4	“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth.”
Genesis 5:1	“These are the generations of Adam.”
Genesis 6:9	“These are the generations of Noah.”
Genesis 10:1	“These are the generations of the sons of Noah.”
Genesis 11:10	“These are the generations of Shem.”
Genesis 11:27	“These are the generations of Terah.”
Genesis 25:12	“These are the generations of Ishmael.”
Genesis 25:12	“These are the generations of Isaac.”
Genesis 36:1	“These are the generations of Esau.”
Genesis 37:2	“These are the generations of Jacob.”


Clues in Genesis to Meaning of Life

Genesis is like a magnifying glass through which we can discern both where we come from and the meaning of our existence. Like detectives sorting out a mystery, we try to understand who we are, and attempt to make sense of the universe and our existence. We perceive two clues to our origins, purpose, and destiny—first: using our senses and reason, we observe the objective reality of an orderly universe around us; and second: we also discover Mankind’s unique and definite personality with our ability to reason, communicate, create, love, make moral judgments, and sense our own existence.

These two clues are mentioned by St. Paul in Romans. First, he refers to our observation of the universe in which we live. He wrote: “Ever since the creation of the world, [God’s] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Secondly, he refers to the internal knowledge that God has planted within us—our innate sense of personhood, of being made in the image of God with a conscience—“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them” (Romans 1:19).

Paul refers to the Law of God in the Old Testament and to the internal law written upon the hearts of all men. You will see here the internal witness to God and his law: “When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them” (Romans 2:14-15).

We begin with these two enormous clues: the objective world around us and the internal knowledge of our humanity as well as the existence of an intelligent, personal and moral creator. As detectives we look further. How did we get here? There are only three real possibilities: 1) everything that exists came from



Nothing with a capital “N”; 2) everything that exists came from an impersonal beginning; or 3) everything originated from a personal beginning.

Starting with absolutely nothing and ending up with the universe and the reality in which we live is not a rational alternative. So, now let’s look at the possibility of an impersonal beginning.

Atheists, materialists and secularists will tell us that the material universe is eternal and it is all that exists. It is a big, impersonal machine, and we are small machines within the larger machine. The complexity of this mechanism is a combination of eternal matter, plus time, plus chance. It is random and has no ultimate meaning. We are stuck in this machine and ultimately we are just as meaningless. As the astronomer Carl Sagan once said, “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be” (*Cosmos* [PBS television special], 1980). In other words, there is no God, and only the universe exists. With this view, Man is just a complex combination of molecules, hormones, and electronic impulses. In this theory, a man does not *love* a woman, he simply has a hormonal reaction toward her.

The last of the three options is that there is something bigger than the material universe and outside of it. This *something* is personal and has intelligence. This artist or creator made the universe and fashioned Man for a purpose. The universe and our existence are the result of a personal beginning. We are made in the image of this artist/creator, and this explains why the universe exists and who we are. It takes far less faith to believe this final option than it does the previous two. As human persons we know we are more than merely a complex machine with no ultimate purpose or meaning. We sense that we have importance, that we should be treated with dignity, and that there is a difference between right and wrong. Just let someone stomp on our toes to see how fast we make moral judgments and defend our rights and personhood. Machines don’t do that.

Genesis as Art

When we put down our microscopes, we ask, “What philosophy or view of reality best explains the clues we have discovered?” This is where the Book of Genesis fits in. Here we find a personal and infinite God who created the world and Man by an act of his will and for his pleasure. He is separate and apart from his creation, yet it bears his imprint. He is an artist and the universe is his poem. This is how St. Paul describes it in Romans 1:20, which we looked at earlier. The five English words translated as the “things that have been made” come from one Greek word, *poiema*, from which we get our English word, *poem*.

God composed a poem, a work of art when he created the universe and Man. And when we look at this great artwork, we can know something of God, the artist. We are made in his image: he loves, so we can love; he creates, so we can create; he communicates, so we can speak to one another; he created a work of art, so we can enjoy beauty; he can choose, so we’ve been given free will in his image; he is intelligent, so we can reason and have abstract thoughts; he is infinite, so we have a reference point to give meaning to us and all of existence. Even the great scientists have explained science as “thinking God’s thoughts after him.”

The Meaning of Genesis

All of this brings us back to the Book of Genesis, a beautiful and profound story that is revelatory truth from God. He *wants* us to know who he is, who we are, what he created. He wants us to know why things are not perfect today the way he intended them to be. He explains that Mankind violated the moral law and disrupted the universe. Even St. Paul says the whole of creation is groaning because of Man’s rebellion against the Creator. C. S. Lewis described it brilliantly in his book, *Out of the Silent Planet*. He said that the whole universe still sings and shimmers in the beauty of God’s artistry and poetry, but earth is now the “bent planet.” Corruption and evil entered the paradise created by God so earth is quarantined from the rest of the universe. It is shrouded in darkness and isolation until the contamination of sin and disobedience which mangled the poem is finally remedied.

Genesis tells us this story. It tells us that God created us; that we are made in his image; that we are the glory of his earthly creation; that we rebelled against him; that he has begun the plan for our redemption; that this saving plan was begun through a certain family line; and that his promise is not just a casual agreement between God and man, but a blood oath, a covenant made by God which is a bigger and stronger bond than Mankind can ever know. It is the infinite God with infinite love and mercy who has set out to restore the painting, to correct the poem, to set right the creation, to redeem man who is made in his image.

And so we embark on the most important book in the world, the book that is more than mere words on a page. It is a book with living words, powerful words, true words. They come from the artist himself; they are the words of God put into writing so that we can understand, have a *lamp to our feet and a light to our path* (Psalms 119:105). These words are filled with life and give us hope. They point back to the love God demonstrated when he made us and forward to the final salvation he will bring us through his own Son.

This is Genesis and we have been gifted by God with these words in our very hands. The words contained in this treasure are sweeter than honey and more life-giving than food. Blessed be God forever!

Among all the Scriptural texts about creation, the first three chapters of Genesis occupy a unique place. From a literary standpoint these texts may have had diverse sources. The inspired authors have placed them at the beginning of Scripture to express in their solemn language the truths of creation - its origin and its end in God, its order and goodness, the vocation of man, and finally the drama of sin and the hope of salvation. Read in the light of Christ, within the unity of Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church, these texts remain the principal source for catechesis on the mysteries of the “beginning”: creation, fall, and promise of salvation. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 289)

Catechism Connections

- Learn about the proofs of the existence of God. CCC 31, 32
- Understand why creation is the foundation of “all God’s saving plans.” CCC 280, 282
- Understand the value and limitations of science. CCC 2293, 2294
- Learn what human intelligence can learn about the question of our origin, and what else is needed for full understanding. CCC 286, 287

Rome to Home

From September 1979 to November 1984, Pope John Paul II’s weekly general audiences consisted of a catechesis on the body of the human person in light of Biblical revelation. During one such address, on January 2, 1980, he spoke on creation as a fundamental and original gift:

The Creator is he who “calls to existence from nothingness,” and who establishes the world in existence and man in the world, because he “is love” (1 John 4:8). Actually, we do not find this word in the narrative of creation. However, this narrative often repeats: “God saw what he had made, and behold, it was very good.” Through these words we are led to glimpse in love the divine motive of creation, the source from which it springs. Only love gives a beginning to good and delights in good (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). As the action of God, the creation signifies not only calling from nothingness to existence and establishing the existence of the world and of man in the world. It also signifies, according to the first narrative, *beresit bara*, giving. It is a fundamental and “radical” giving, that is, a giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothingness.

The reading of the first chapters of Genesis introduces us to the mystery of creation, that is, the beginning of the world by the will of God, who is omnipotence and love. Consequently, every creature bears within it the sign of the original and fundamental gift.

~ His Holiness Pope John Paul II
Theology of the Body, 13

Voices of the Saints

“Saint Paul tells us, ‘The letter kills, but the spirit gives life’ [2 Corinthians 3:6]. A man has been killed by the letter of the Sacred Scripture when he wants to quote it only so that people will think him to be very learned ... when he has no desire to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but wants to know what it says only so he can explain it to others.”

~ St. Francis of Assisi

Additional Resources

The following list of resources may be helpful to you as you journey through this study of Genesis. Don't forget that additional resources, as well as the Ask-the-Author forum, are available to registered participants at CSSProgram.net.

- * The Revised Standard Version of the Bible - Catholic Edition
- * *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC]

- * *Theology of the Body* [TOB], by Pope John Paul II
 - Published in print by The Daughters of St. Paul: www.pauline.org
 - Online version is available through the EWTN website: www.ewtn.com

- * The encyclicals of the Vatican II Council, as well as other encyclicals, can be accessed through the website for the Holy See at: www.vatican.va



Notes:

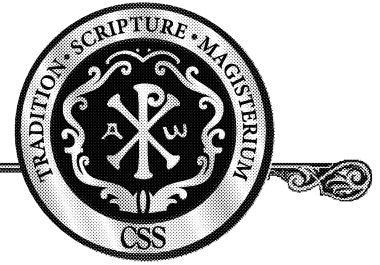


Notes:



Genesis

Lesson 1: *Let There Be Light*



Introduction

In the beginning, there was an Artist; in fact, the Artist was there *before* the beginning and is the source of “the beginning.” Time, space, and matter were conceived in the mind of the Artist and brought into being by his Word (2 Maccabees 7:28), and for his good pleasure. Unlike artists that exist within creation, this Artist had no materials from which to create; he created from nothing everything that exists outside of himself, and he did so in order to express the superabundance of his love, because he *himself* is love. Therefore, the Artist endowed his work with expressions of this love by creating a perfect harmony of beauty and truth so that all who perceive his work will know something of himself—the fullness of Love—who is both beautiful and true.

Finally, just as a painter is not *himself* a part of his painting, the Creator of all things exists outside of his creation. Thus, he is able to gaze upon his work with satisfaction and declare, “It is good.”

Genesis 1:1-31

Chapter 1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

6 And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. 17 And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature

that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then 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.” **27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO MEDITATE UPON GOD’S WORD IS THROUGH MEMORIZATION.
A SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSE IS PRINTED IN BOLD WITHIN THE BIBLICAL TEXT
OR YOU MAY WISH TO CHOOSE A VERSE ON YOUR OWN.


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Points to Ponder

The Artist and His Motivation

Everything that exists was created by God, the Artist, who is also a poet. In Romans 1:20, we are told that we can know much about the Artist simply by observing his physical creation: the “things that have been made.” These five English words are the translation of the one Greek word, *poiema*. In Ephesians, St. Paul describes the second creation, that of the Church, and says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus”. In this passage, the word “workmanship” is also translated from the Greek word *poiema*. So through both the physical world and through the Church on earth, *the Artist-Poet* reveals himself to man. Interestingly, it is from this Greek word, *poiema*, that we derive our English word, *poem*; and that is probably why earthly poets, in imitation of the First Poet, express themselves through their poetry.

God did not create a universe and the creatures in it because he was lonely and needed someone to love. The Creator is, from all eternity, a communion of persons. He is the Most Holy Trinity—one God, three Persons. God is *Elohim*, which is not a name but the general Hebrew word for *deity*, and it is grammatically plural. Before the beginning of time, the three Persons of the Trinity were already eternally loving each other as a family unit: Father, Son and Holy Spirit—unity in trinity, trinity in unity, existing together as one



God, eternally. The love of the Trinity is so immense that God created the universe and mankind to express and share his love beyond himself, ultimately through his Word made flesh in the person of Jesus. For “the Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history” (*Redemptor Hominis*, no. 1).

God’s name is *YHWY*, “I Am Who I Am” (Ex 3:13-15). It is impossible for our finite human minds to comprehend the infinite mystery of a being who is eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere and always present, and completely self-sufficient. It is with faith and grace that we accept this mystery because he tells us it is so. Genesis is not about God’s origins because he has none; he has no beginning and no end; he is the *Alpha* and the *Omega* (Rev 22:13).

Creative Cooperation

We know that Genesis means *beginning*, but the beginning of what? We can simply look to the text itself and see that Genesis refers to the beginning of *all* things: the universe, the earth, plants, beasts and mankind—anything and everything outside of God himself. St. John tells us in his Gospel that it was through the Word of God that all things came into being:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:1-3)

The Word the Father spoke was, is, and will be the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14)

In the beginning, God’s canvas was formless and void, with no light and no life. Darkness covered the surface of the deep, but a creative wind was blowing. This wind was not an impersonal force, a mere movement of air molecules. The Hebrew word for *wind* is *ruach*; the same word is used for *spirit* or *breath*. With this understanding of *wind*, we see that it was the Third Person of the Trinity—the Spirit of God—that moved over the face of the waters. Thus, the first movement in creation was by means of water and Spirit. This cooperative action is seen again in God’s second creation, that of the Church: we are born again into Christ by water and Spirit (John 3:3-5), as demonstrated by Jesus himself at his baptism (Matthew 3:16).


Once called into being, the newly created matter lacked order and needed to be differentiated into specific categories and life forms. So God set about the task of shaping and forming the raw materials he had just called into being. He would bring order out of chaos, cooperating in unity with the Son and the Spirit as one creative God.

Creation *Ex Nihilo*

It cannot be emphasized enough that God created the world “out of nothing”, *ex nihilo*. In fact, the sacred writers of Scripture are careful to distinguish the words used for the action of creation. The Hebrew word *bara’*, means to “create a new thing”. It is used in Sacred Scripture only when referring to God’s action of creating something out of nothing by divine fiat, by his divine Word. *Bara’* differs in meaning from another Hebrew word, *yasar*, which means primarily “to fashion” an object already in existence. The words are used within the text to make the powerful theological distinction between creation *ex nihilo* and creation *creatio ex materia* (something from something). By choosing the word *bara’*, the sacred author wants to express the utter newness of creation, that it has been brought into existence by the originative power of God without recourse to any pre-existing matter. At one moment, there is nothing; in the next moment, there is something. Psalm 33 poetically affirms this: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made [*bara’*], and all their host by the breath of his mouth For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth” (Psalms 33:1,9).

Order Begets Beauty

Once God created his raw materials *ex nihilo*, he then had unformed matter, void, darkness, and deep waters from which to work. The images of these elements in the first chapter of Genesis represent chaos that will be *formed* into right order by God. Like a painter commencing his work with raw materials, God now begins the process of creating his masterpiece with the raw materials he has just created *ex nihilo*.



There is a pattern or rhythm to God's creation process that is presented within the framework of six days: two days then one, two days then one. On days one and two, God performs one act; on day three, he acts twice. On days four and five, God performs one act; on day six, he acts twice. Days three and six parallel one another with two acts of creation on each, but also because the second act on each day involves the creation of life. On day three, his second act brings forth life from the ground—vegetation; on day six his second act brings life from the ground—Man.

Day One:

We read in Genesis 1:3-5 that on day one, God created light. Since we do not see the creation of the sun and the moon until the fourth day, the source of this light has become a cause for much discussion. The ancients did not have our modern scientific view of the cosmos and the action of the sun and the earth. They did not believe that all light came from the sun. Because the sky was illuminated even on cloudy days, and before or after the sun rose and set, many rabbis considered this initial light to be the splendor of the Divine Presence. One commentary explains it this way:

The first thing created by the divine Word was “light,” the elementary light, or light-material, in distinction from the “lights,” or light-bearers, bodies of light, as the sun, moon, and stars, created on the fourth day, are called. It is now a generally accepted truth of natural science, that the light does not spring from the sun and stars, but that the sun itself is a dark body, and the light proceeds from an atmosphere which surrounds it. Light was the first thing called forth, and separated from the dark chaos by the creative mandate.

Commentary on the Old Testament
Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 2002

We are told that there was evening and morning the first day. This always prompts the question about whether or not creation was accomplished over six literal days. While we do not have room here to discuss all the arguments for and against, we should recall from the introduction that Genesis was written not for the purpose of conveying scientific truth, but to convey theological truth. We also need to recognize: a) that the stories in Genesis that were intended to convey profound and invisible realities, do so in such a way as to make them comprehensible to man; and b) the original audience of Genesis was a pre-scientific world.

While the actual scientific process of creation would surely make for the ultimate science adventure, the Holy Spirit, the primary author of Scripture, does not speak of atoms made of neutrons, protons and electrons rotating millions of miles an hour and held in place by gravity and centrifugal force. He does not speak of atomic particles, radioactive materials, black holes, or the formation of galaxies. Even if the minute details of the chemical, mathematical, biological, and atomic processes that he initiated at the dawn of all things *were* revealed, there is no doubt that even the most brilliant of today's scientist would be left in the dark (pun intended).

We must always remember the purpose of the “story” of Genesis—that it was inspired and recorded so that Man might know the *who* and the *why* of creation, not that Man might know the science of the *what* and the *how* of creation. So, we are missing the point if we seek only to prove or disprove that creation was accomplished in six literal days. God blessed us with our reason and our senses to explore the scientific truths of his creation on our own, which, by the way, will ultimately lead to him anyway when rightly pursued because science has its origin in God who is Truth.

God affirms that the result of this first day of creation is good. He will repeat this appraisal after each day until he makes man, whom he declares to be “very good.”

Day Two:

On day one, God differentiated the light from the darkness, day from night. On day two, he further differentiated his creation by separating two great bodies of water—the water covering the earth and the water above the earth. What we know now as the atmosphere was then called the *firmament*, and with it God divided the waters. It was the waters above the firmament that would one day rain down on the earth during the flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 7:11-12, Psalms 78:23, 2 Kings 7:2,19). Some translations use the word *expanse*. The Hebrew word for firmament is derived from a word meaning to *stamp* or *spread*.

Used in Exodus 39:3, its meaning is to hammer a piece of metal and flatten it out in order to cover an extended area.

Day Three:

Differentiation continues on day three. The surface of the earth is still covered with huge waves breaking over the deep waters, and at this point there is no land, only water—water everywhere. Addressing the water on the earth (not above the firmament), God commands that the water be gathered into one place, allowing land to appear. He called the land, *earth*, and the waters, he called the *seas*. Once again, God saw that it was good.

There is no new creation here in God's first action on day three; there is only the organization and shaping of existing material. One can imagine the continents and islands forming and rising out of the ocean with the waters receding into the seas. In the time of Noah, we will see these sea-gathering boundaries breached, and chaos will return to the earth for a short time.

Recall the creative rhythm mentioned earlier—two days then one day, two days then one day. Day one and day two both consisted of a single action, but here on the third day, God doesn't stop after just one act. His organizational act of dividing land from water prepares the way for another, *creative*, action. In this second action on day three, God commands the newly formed land to produce vegetation, giving it generative powers. He creates living plants that produce seeds for their own propagation, each producing according to its own species: apple seeds producing apple trees; peach seeds producing peach trees.

It is plain to see how this second action is something more than just distinguishing one element from another. In this action, God calls forth life from the earth. Of course, plant life is not the same as animal or human life that breathes, and the powerful Hebrew term, *bara'*, is not employed, but it is life nonetheless. And for the second time on day three, "it was so," and "God saw that it was good."

In pagan religions, it is believed that gods inhabit the earth and that they are the potent forces that make trees grow, springs gurgle, and rains fall. But when God reveals that he imbues the earth with the ability to generate living plants, he essentially pulls back the curtain on the pagan gods, illustrating that it is he, not some mythical being, who animates nature. And, unlike pagan gods believed to exist *within* nature, the God of Genesis exists apart from his creation. Vegetation, like the rest of creation, serves and obeys God's commands, and follows the laws of nature that he embedded into the fabric of creation. No pagan gods need apply; they are unnecessary. Nature is not itself a god, nor do gods animate it. In fact, nature itself is *devoid* of a spiritual nature. In other words, nature is nature, and God is God. Nature is a creation of the one God. God is outside nature, and it is he who created, controls, and sustains his creation.


Day Four:

We are surprised that God would wait till the fourth day to create the sun, moon and stars, after creating on the third day the vegetation that needs sunlight to survive. But elemental light was created on day one, and it is now concentrated in the heavenly bodies: the sun, moon, and stars. Thus the great lights now mark days, months, and years. God made the lights and set them in the firmament of the heavens. "It was so," and "God saw that it was good."

In ancient cultures, the celestial luminaries were considered deities. In order to minimize their importance, the sun and moon are not named as such in the creation story of Genesis. They are only described; to name them would be to recall contemporary pagan deities, such as the Egyptian sun god, *Ra*. The sacred writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, puts them in their proper cosmological place; they are not gods but creations of the one true God, and like the vegetation, they serve their Creator by differentiating day and night, seasons, days, and years. The stars, likewise, are in the sky, but are not given any particular importance.

Day Five:

At the dawn of day five, we have land separated from water, sunlight shining on the earth, living plants producing vegetation, and an atmosphere above the earth; it would seem suitable now for animal life. Following the rhythm of creation and corresponding with day two, we can expect one creative act on day five, the second day in the second cycle of three days. Up until now God has been shaping and making, but we haven't seen the type of creation described as *bara'* since Genesis 1:1, when God created the heavens and



the earth. Now we again see the Hebrew word *bara*’; God creates animal life, bringing forth two kinds of animals—animals that swim and animals that fly.

At God’s command, the seas bring forth swarms of living water creatures, including great sea monsters. No doubt these included plankton and whales, shrimp and lobsters, fish and sea turtles. If you have ever watched *National Geographic* or other nature documentaries, you would agree that it is difficult not to be amazed at the staggering variety of creatures living in the seas. The brilliant colors, bizarre shapes, and odd characteristics never cease to amaze. One suspects that it was with much glee and pleasure that God created such a great variety of gorgeous and amazing sea creatures. The waters certainly did “bring forth the swarms of living creatures.”

Pagan cultures worshipped the “sea monsters” as deities that symbolized the cause of chaos. By mentioning the “sea monsters” as a direct creation of God at this time in the creation process, the mythical divinity attributed to them by the pagans is stripped away. These “sea monsters” could have been the great, impressive-looking creatures of the oceans, including very large fish and giant marine mammals, such as whales.

God also created (*bara*’), the winged creatures of the air. Many people enjoy the hobby of bird-watching and know the thrill in discovering a bird they have never seen before. How God must have thrilled at creating the birds, with their great beauty and technology of flight.

He commanded these creatures of sea and air to “be fruitful and multiply,” to fill the waters and the sky. They have certainly obeyed him; the instinct to reproduce, survive, and fill the earth is built right into their nature. “God saw that it was good.” It was now the end of the fifth day.

Day Six:

Now that the water and sky are filled with self-propagating creatures, God is ready for day six. Corresponding to day three in the first cycle of creation, God will perform two distinct actions on this day: the creation of land animals, and the creation of Man. God makes the animals that will crawl upon the land and he creates Man, who will have dominion over them.

First, God creates the land animals in distinct categories of creatures, according to their kind. These are the mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, spiders and every other creeping, walking, crawling, climbing, hopping and slithering creature. Once again, the great Artist produces a stunning array of creative brilliance and diversity.

With the creation of man, we reach the final act in the drama of creation, the crowning action that is at the heart of Divine Revelation. All that has been created until this point was in preparation for the creation of Man (CCC 258). Mankind is to be unlike anything else in creation, for God wills to make Man in his own image and likeness. Man is to be a creature capable of relating to beings both heavenly (spiritual), and earthly (corporeal). He will have a physical body like the animals, but he will also have a spirit like the angels. Nevertheless, it is the *whole* man that is made in the image of God, not merely his spirit. Man does not *have* a body; he *is* his body. Man does not *have* a spirit; he *is* his spirit. “The central dogmas of the Christian faith imply that the body is an intrinsic part of the human person and thus participates in his being created in the image of God” (Ratzinger, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 2004).

In the ancient world, an *image* was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented, so that the action of a deity was carried out through its image. Similarly, Man, who was made in the image of God, would be understood to have something of God’s *essence* in him. God is personal; Man is personal. God is spirit; Man is spirit (as well as corporal). God is love, and Man is created with the ability to love. God can create, exercise his will, communicate, think rationally and abstractly—all attributes personified in Man precisely because Man is made in the image of God. It would further be understood in ancient times that God may choose to delegate certain actions to Man, who is made in his image. As God has dominion over the universe, so man will have dominion over the animals; as God sustains his creation from without, so Man will be charged with tending and keeping parts of it from within. As an image, Man makes manifest a reality that is other than himself, and in that reality Man has meaning and dignity.

The Psalmist meditates on the mystery of Mankind:

When I look at your heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field. (Psalms 8:3-7)

A Foreshadowing of the Revelation of the Most Holy Trinity

Earlier in this lesson we touched upon the nature of the Most Holy Trinity: one God in three Persons. We also learned that the word used for God in the first chapter of Genesis is *Elohim*, which is grammatically a plural noun. With this understanding of God, one may not feel the need to reflect much on God's use of plural pronouns in his action on the sixth day: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." However, its use has actually been the source of much speculation.

It has been suggested that God is employing the "plural of majesty," like a king who, by his own authority, issues a decree in the plural: "We decree ..." The problem with this theory is that there is no precedent for it in ancient documents or in Scripture. Another explanation suggests that, because Scripture describes God as being surrounded by his celestial court of angels, the angels are included in the "us." But while there is no doubt that a heavenly host surrounds the throne of God, there is nothing in Scripture or Tradition that suggests the angels co-created with God.

A third explanation, not to the exclusion of the others, is that God is referring to himself as a plurality of Persons. But it would be risky to say this instance of plurality refers to the Trinity since the writer undoubtedly knew no such concept. On the other hand, one must realize that the Holy Spirit is the primary author of Scripture and often reveals more through the writer than the writer may completely comprehend himself. It cannot be denied that the plurality of *Elohim* and God's use of "our" and "us," at the very least, allows for the New Testament revelation of the Holy Trinity. We know from the writings of the New Testament that the early Church understood that Christ was active in creation with the Father and the Spirit; perhaps the use of the plural divine pronouns assisted in laying the foundation for the development of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity.

Most modern scholars look askance at suggestions that the Trinity could be alluded to here, but the Fathers of the Church were not as skeptical. They did not blush to perceive the Trinity revealed in the divine plural. From the days of the early Church, Christians have traditionally seen the Trinity in Genesis 1:26:

For God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"; and a little after, it is said, "So God created man in the image of God." Certainly, in that is of the plural number, the word "our" would not be rightly used if man were made in the image of one person, whether of the Father, or of the Son, or of the Holy Spirit; but because he was made in the image of the Trinity, on that account it is said, "after our image." But again, lest we should think that three Gods were to be believed in the Trinity, whereas the same Trinity is one God, it is said, "So God created man in the image of God", instead of saying, "In His own image."

St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*

Man: Male and Female—in His Image

The Hebrew word for man is *'adam*. *Man* is a generic term for *mankind*, encompassing both male and female. It was noted earlier that the image of God bestowed on Man must be understood as being manifest in Man as a whole: a creature that is at once both fully physical and fully spiritual. The importance of rejecting any suggestion of dualism in the nature of Man becomes clearer when one considers the Trinitarian nature of God.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, referred to the human person as a being created in the image of God when he wrote, "the mystery of man cannot be grasped apart from the mystery of God" (*Communion and Stewardship*, 2004). Given the Trinitarian nature of God, a communion of persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—it follows that man, as created in God's image, must also be a relational being. The creation of man as "male and female" demonstrates that man was not created as an isolated being, but

as a “person” who is in relation with other persons. Now add to this that man, as an “image” of God, makes visible the invisible. The purpose of an image is to reflect its model. With this in mind, it begins to become clear that the physical nature of man is integral to making the communion of persons, the Trinitarian nature of God, visible in the physical world (see Ratzinger. *Communion and Stewardship*, 2004).

Additionally, by revealing that “God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27), it is revealed that male and female are equal in dignity and complementary to one another in their masculinity and femininity. In being created as male and female, “man and woman constitute two different ways of the human body ‘being a body’” (Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, 58).

When God finishes his creative work on day six, he does not see that it is merely good; rather, he sees that it is “very good”! It is now the end of the sixth day.

Evolution?

Ever since Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, there has been discussion among Christians about how this impacts an understanding of the creation accounts in Genesis. The Catholic Church recognizes no conflict between legitimate science and religion because both seek Truth; God is Truth, and Truth will never contradict Truth. Catholics are therefore allowed to believe that an evolutionary process was used by God, and they are not obliged to believe in a literal six-day creation, made up of twenty-four-hour days. These theories relate to the *process* of creation, not the *origin* of creation. What Catholics *must* believe is that in the beginning, God created everything *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Catholics are obliged to believe that God created life, and that man’s spiritual soul was and is created immediately by God. A Catholic cannot hold that it was a matter of chance that brought about a process of evolution, or that matter existed eternally. Additionally, Catholics cannot hold that the soul of man evolved; Catholic teaching informs us that man’s spiritual soul was and is a direct and conscious creation of God. God infused an immortal soul into Man, and as a result, Man is created in the image of God. Whether you consider that Man was created from dust or by a process of divine evolution—in either case, God infused the soul, reaching down, breathing it in, and thereby conferring incredible dignity to Man.

Conclusion

The first command God imposed on Man was that he “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” over all the creatures God had created. If you ever looked down on the earth from the window of an airplane, you saw evidence that man has done just that. Looking down, you saw the patchwork quilt of fields and farms, bustling cities, and ships upon the sea. But the earth is not ours to abuse, exploit, or raze. We are here on earth as God’s regents, stewards of the good gifts God has granted us.

God does not communicate directly to plants or animals as he does to Man. Because Man is created in God’s image, he can communicate directly with the Almighty. God is transcendent but he is also personal, and he condescends to have communion with Man.

Catechism Connections

- God transcends creation. CCC 290, 300
- Creation finds its meaning in Christ. CCC 315, 349
- God creates everything from nothing. CCC 296-298, 338
- Understand more fully what the soul is. CCC 33, 363-366
- All of creation is a work of the Holy Trinity. CCC 258, 292, 316.
- Read more about man as the crowning glory of God’s creation. CCC 2566
- God upholds and sustains creation from moment to moment; creation is dependent upon him. CCC 301, 320

Voices of the Saints

”Listen to the sermon preached to you by the flowers, the trees, the shrubs, the sky, and the whole world. Notice how they preach to you a sermon full of love, of praise of God, and how they invite you to glorify the sublimity of that sovereign Artist who has given them being.”

~St. Paul of the Cross

Questions for Reflection

The following questions are intended to help you reflect upon ways in which the discoveries you’ve made in this lesson can be applied to your own life.

1. In Question 5 we touched on the temptations to idolatry that exist in the world today. Prayerfully examine your own priorities and passions. What things in your life compete for the love that is due to God alone? Remember, you’re not searching for things that actually receive this love, but rather things that in some way, perhaps even small ways, serve as a distraction from loving God above all else.

2. Reflect on those people who most challenge and aggravate you. How might you go about seeing within them the image of the Creator so as to alleviate any hostility that might exist in your heart toward those persons?

Summary: Lesson 1

In this lesson we learned:

1. The early Church Fathers perceived the Trinity in the first chapter of Genesis.
2. Jesus is not among the created, but is the Creator.
3. While there is a literal sense to all Scripture, not every phrase should be taken literally.
4. God sustains his creation at every moment; he has not left us to our own devices.
5. God has always existed. He is the beginning and the end, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.
6. God created everything out of nothing, *ex nihilo*.
7. There is a rhythm to God's Creation process.
8. God created animals and Man, and he gave Man dominion over the animals.
9. Catholics may believe in an evolutionary *process* in creation; they are not obliged to believe in a literal six-day Creation.
10. Catholics are obliged to believe that the creation of man's soul was an immediate and direct action of God. Catholic teaching holds that the human soul did not "evolve."



Notes: