

CHAPTER

# 5

## CREATION AND THE FALL

*In the beginning God created  
the heavens and the earth.*

—GENESIS 1:1

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Either before you arrive or as you wait for class to begin, find this short passage from Sacred Scripture in your Bible or through an online search. Reading it will prepare you for this week's material.*

—Genesis 1:26–31

### OPENING PRAYER

O God our Father, creator of heaven and earth, you have made us in your own image and likeness and given us dominion over the earth. Help us to use wisely the things of the earth so as to attain the things of heaven. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



### SESSION 5 VIDEO LESSON: CREATION AND THE FALL

*As you watch the video lesson, refer to these key highlights. Feel free to use the space provided to take notes.*

- ♦ The two creation narratives of Genesis reveal theological truths about the nature of creation.

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- ♦ God created the world out of nothing and sustains it in being. God freely created the world to show forth and share his goodness.

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- ♦ Intelligent creatures (angels and men) are the highest part of creation and are capable of knowing and loving. A human being is a composite of body and a spiritual soul. The soul is created directly by God.
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- ♦ God's Revelation about creation does not conflict with the authentic findings of the natural sciences.
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- ♦ The first human beings were created in a state of friendship with God but fell away through a free choice against him known as original sin.
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- ♦ Sin has wounded man's relationship with God, with others, and with himself. Nevertheless, human nature remains fundamentally good and may be healed and transformed through God's grace.
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## *Wisdom of the Saints*

We look upon the heavens and the earth, and they cry aloud that they were made. It was you, Lord, who made them: for You are beautiful, and they are beautiful: You are good, and they are good: You are, and they are.

—St. Augustine

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*Take a moment to answer these questions with a partner or with the group.*

1. Why did God create? Why did he make many different kinds of things?

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2. Explain the place of the human person in creation. What makes human beings different from other animals? What makes human beings different from angels?

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3. Why do the true findings of physics or biology fail to threaten the Catholic understanding of creation? How does the human soul come about?

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4. How is our life different than the life of Adam and Eve in paradise? How has original sin affected humanity?

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## *Catechism Connection*

The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the “reverse side” of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men, that all need salvation, and that salvation is offered to all through Christ.

—CCC 389

### LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

*Discuss these questions with a partner or the group, or meditate on your own.*

1. How is the Catholic doctrine of creation different from your previous understanding of the world? How do you think it is different from the average person’s understanding today?

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2. The doctrine of creation reveals that God created you in his image and that he wants you to be happy with him forever. Explain what this means for you and how you would like to grow in your identity as a child of God.

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3. Have you ever found it very difficult to choose what you know is right and good? How does the doctrine of original sin help make sense of your experience?

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In every age, God's people have been called to conversion. In this section, we will explore how God's grace can bring us back to him.

### **WITNESS TO CONVERSION**

After concluding your group discussion, return to watch the second video where converts to the Catholic faith discuss their conversion and how they live today as Catholics.

## *Rome to Home*

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God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning “male and female he created them.”

Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.

—Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12

**KEY TERMS**

**Creation Accounts:** The two accounts at the beginning of the book of Genesis. They are not intended to be strictly historical accounts but rather reveal theological truths that form the fundamental basis for Catholic reflection on the nature of God's creation.

**Spiritual Soul:** The immaterial component of the human person. Described as "the breath of life" in the book of Genesis (Gn 2:7), the soul is endowed with an intellect and will. The soul survives death and makes man capable of friendship with God through grace.

**Original Justice:** The state of human beings before the fall characterized by intimate communion with God and harmony within man, harmony between man and woman, and harmony with the whole of creation.

**Original Sin:** The sin by which the first human beings disobeyed the commandment of God, choosing to follow their own will rather than God's. In addition, this term describes the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world.

**Concupiscence:** The weakness in doing good that we experience as an effect of original sin.



## *God's Word*

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

—1 Corinthians 15:21–22

**CLOSING PRAYER**

O Lord, good Father, who in your providence have entrusted the earth to the human race, grant we pray, that with the fruits harvested from it we may be able to sustain life and, with your help, always use them to promote your praise and the well-being of all. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

—FROM THE MASS AFTER HARVEST TIME

**AT HOME REVIEW**

*Read this review of the material. Write down any questions you still have after doing so.*

**Made for God**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). These opening words of the Bible reveal God as the creator of all things visible and invisible. By the mere utterance of his word, he creates heaven and earth and the vast multitude of living and non-living things. The Christian faith maintains that God’s act of creation far surpasses any human act of making or doing since God did not create out of any preexisting material

but brought things into being from nothingness (see 2 Mc 7:28). All things rely on God for their existence to be preserved in being (see Acts 17:28).

The book of Genesis contains two creation accounts found in the first two chapters (so that we read, for example, about the creation of man in two different places—Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:7—but these are distinct and complementary, not conflicting), which emphasize different aspects of creation. The Church does not interpret them simplistically as strictly historical records. Rather, the creation accounts reveal theological truths that form the fundamental basis for Catholic reflection on the nature of God's creation.

But why is there any world at all and why did God create? People in all times and places have tried to answer these questions. In ancient times, some believed the universe was the result of a cosmic conflict of gods or a necessary overflow of divine power. In our own time, some say the world came about by chance or that there is no real meaning to creation.

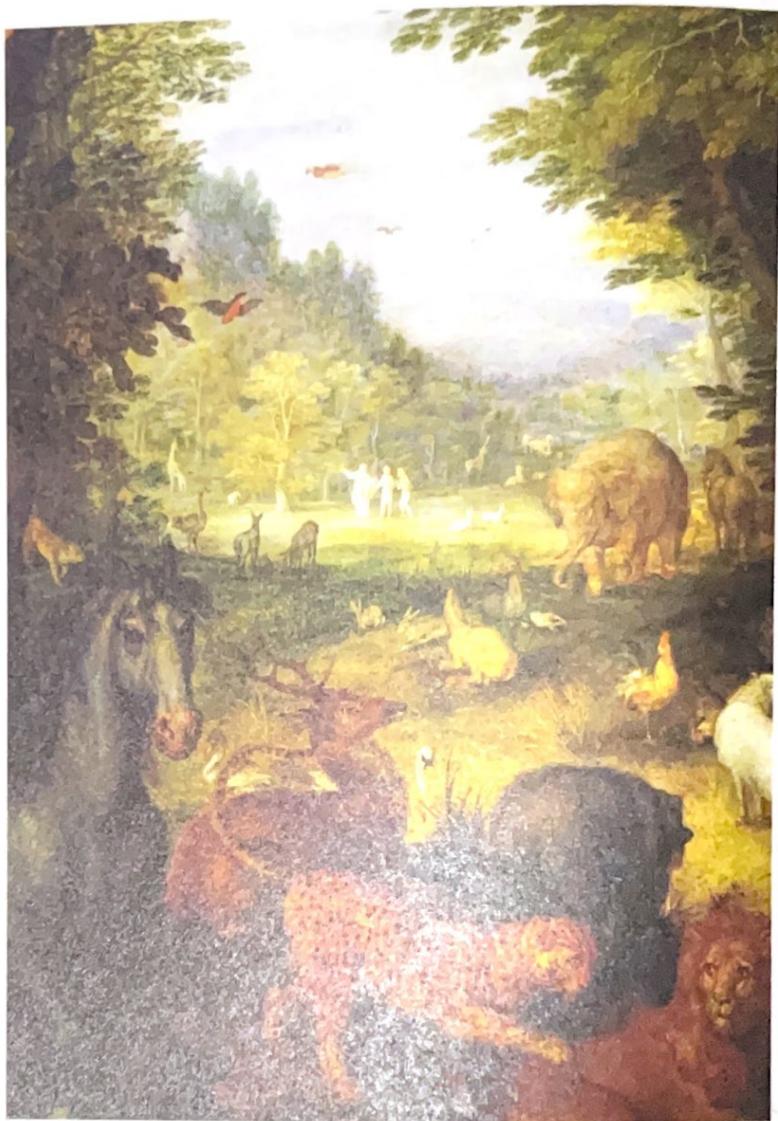
Revelation refutes these explanations. Sacred Scripture and Tradition give us clarity about creation: the Creator has explained his reason for creating. God, who is in himself Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is eternal and outside of time. Everything other than God was created by God “in the beginning” at some first moment. God did not need to create. From all eternity he was, as he is now, self-sufficient and perfectly happy. God didn’t create because he was lonely or lacking in anything. Rather, he freely chose to create all things. He, who is perfect goodness, freely created all that is to show forth and share his goodness. Creation is not an unintentional byproduct or accident but something he delights in, something that is fundamentally good, or “very good” as Genesis tells us (1:31).

God could not manifest his perfect and complete goodness by making just one type of thing, so he created a multitude of things. When we’re trying to describe an idea and no single word perfectly matches our thought, we use many words to explain ourselves. St. Thomas says that, in a similar way, God spoke forth and created not just one creature but a dazzling variety of creatures. God created a diversity in order to manifest, communicate, and share his goodness. The creation accounts capture the powerful variety of creatures. God not only makes the heavens, the earth, and the seas, but the

plants and the living things, the creatures of the earth, the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea. Above this are God's intelligent creatures capable of thinking and choosing, and knowing and loving. Angels and men belong to this last and highest domain of creation. The angels are pure spirits, so they most resemble the pure spiritual simplicity of God himself.

The two creation narratives in Genesis 1–3 use figurative language to reveal God's creative action and the special place of the human person within God's creation. God breathed into the first human beings "the breath of life"; that is, the spiritual soul (Gn 2:7). Having a spiritual soul, man is endowed with the ability to grasp the truth (intellect) and the ability to make free choices (free will). To have a human nature is to have both a physical body and a spiritual soul. I am not merely my body or merely my soul. I am both together. Each human person is thus a kind of summary of all of God's creation since we belong to both the physical and the spiritual domain (whereas a tree belongs only to the physical and an angel only to the spiritual). As Genesis reveals, man is the crowning work of visible creation. Everything we can see exists for human beings. God intends man to "fill the earth and subdue it" and has entrusted us with a dominion and stewardship "over everything living thing" (Gn 1:28). Although man is subject to death, his spiritual soul survives death. Man has a greater destiny than the lower parts of creation since he is able to receive the grace of sharing in the divine life; that is, to be a friend of God and to have eternal life with him.

Many people have the impression that the Catholic doctrine of creation is at odds with modern science. However, faith and reason cannot conflict, because they flow from the same divine source of truth, which is God himself. Thus, the true findings of scientific research cannot be in contradiction to the truth of Divine Revelation. Revelation affirms that God has brought about the world from nothing and continues to preserve it in existence. Any account offered by physicists to explain the origins of the universe ought to be understood as an account of phenomenon taking place within the larger creative and preservative action of God. Similarly, any account of human origins offered by the theory of evolution ought to be understood as an account of something happening within God's larger creative action.



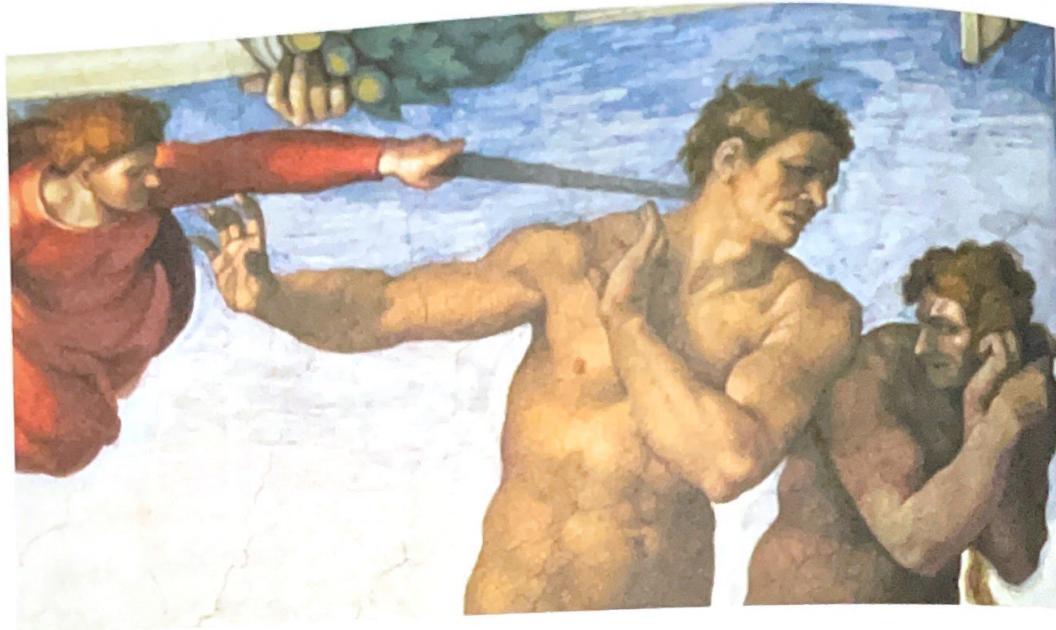
Biologists study the biological origins of the human species and of other forms of life. If we are speaking about how higher forms of life may have arisen from lower forms through a process of evolution, this theory presents no difficulty for the Catholic perspective on human origins. Human beings are “rational animals,” and there is no theological reason why, in God’s providential plan, our animal bodies could not evolve from lower forms of animal life. But at some point, there had to have been the infusion of a spiritual soul—the creation of a spiritual principle that could not simply

evolve from lower life forms—and Revelation affirms with certainty that God did infuse such a soul. Even if man's body evolved from lower forms, God directly created the first “true humans” by infusing a spiritual soul into them. In fact, Catholic doctrine affirms that God continues to directly create the spiritual soul of every human person at conception.

The Genesis narrative about the first beginnings of the human race teaches us that the first human beings were created in a state of communion and friendship with God known as original justice. God not only endowed them with the natural gifts of their human nature, but he lavished upon them supernatural gifts of grace, infusing their souls with knowledge and love. They did not enjoy the full heavenly vision of God yet, but they were oriented towards heavenly happiness by the grace God gave them. They experienced a perfect harmony within themselves, among one another, and with creation. They were strangers to suffering and death. They knew God and found it easy to do good and obey his commands, using their freedom to choose him.

Although God made creation good, evil entered it at some point. Revelation teaches that some of the angels fell and became demons (see 2 Pt 2:4) through an evil choice known as sin. The first among the fallen angels, known as Satan or Lucifer, tempted Adam and Eve and is signified as the serpent in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve did not remain in paradise but fell from the state of original justice through a fundamental choice to disobey God’s command. Adam and Eve abused their freedom and chose against God by eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (see Gn 3:6).

The Scriptures reveal that this first human choice to sin against God, known as original sin, had drastic consequences. Man was separated from friendship with God and suffering and death entered the world. The harmony of original justice was lost and man began to experience strife and conflict with the world, with others, and within himself. The natural paradise gave way to an imperfect world that must be cultivated through difficult labor and is prone to natural disasters (see Gn 3:17–18). In all the ages that followed, human beings would attempt to dominate one another and relationships would be marred by greed and lust (see Gn 3:16).



Our first parents abused their freedom, and the effects of original sin have been passed on to us as a sort of set of spiritual hereditary defects. We experience a deep tension within ourselves, and our lower powers and appetites often rebel against our better judgments. We have concupiscence—that is, a weakness in doing what is good—and so must struggle to make proper moral choices. Our minds have also been weakened and ignorance abounds, especially ignorance about God. Despite all of this, human nature remains fundamentally good; man can still know the truth and make free choices. As we will explore at length later in this program, our souls can be healed and transformed through God's grace.

While the doctrine of the fall and original sin are bad news, it is, in another way, good news and very consoling to ponder. Revelation provides us with an explanation of why the world we live in feels so broken. Human nature, while remaining fundamentally good, has been deeply wounded and scared by the effects of sin. The doctrine of original sin convinces us of the importance of the saving action of Jesus Christ. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). From the hindsight of Christ's death and resurrection, we realize that the sin of Adam and Eve was mysteriously beneficial, a "happy fault" that led to our merciful redemption by Christ.

## I STILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

DIGGING DEEPER

Ratzinger, Joseph. '*In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*'. Eerdmans, 1995.

White, Thomas Joseph. *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*. CUA Press, 2017. See esp. chap. 3.