

Lesson 2

Genesis Chapter 1

Creation

To Moses and those for whom he wrote, the process of creation and the scientific nature of things were shrouded in mystery too deep for man to comprehend. It was the fact that God created everything, and that He made man in His image, that was important. How He went about doing it was His business, as Job was to discover (see **Job 38-39**).

If we approach Genesis 1 as though it is God's revelation of scientific truth, we stumble immediately upon difficulties: How was there "evening and morning, one day" (**vs. 5**) when the sun had yet to be created? How did the fruit trees grow and bear fruit before there were days and nights or seasons? And how do we reconcile creation in six literal, 24-hour days with modern geological science?

Approach Genesis 1 as divine revelation of spiritual truth, and these troubles evaporate. Genesis is more like a hymn than a treatise. It uses poetic language, with symbols and images, to relate the history of the created universe. As such it concerns itself not with how created beings developed over time, but how they came to exist to begin with, by whose decree and to what purpose. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, "the first three chapters of Genesis 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" (**CCC 289**).

Like all good poetry, the language of Genesis is packed with layers of meaning. Only a slow, careful reading will reveal the depths and riches of truth it has to offer. We are therefore going to approach chapter 1 (and chapters 2 and 3) differently from the way we approach later chapters. We will take it very slowly, soaking in the chapter as a whole and observing as much as we can about who God is, what and why He created, who we are and our purpose on earth.

With class read aloud Chapter 1 of Genesis.

1. Discuss the Jewish account of the creation of the universe.

Why does God need to create anything?

What exactly is meant by: "both heaven and earth?"

Show how God, all three persons, are present during creation (God, the Father; the Son, the word; The Spirit, the Spirit.)

Read John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-18, and Hebrews 1:1-3. How do these New Testament references to the creation of the world expand the picture that we get from Genesis 1?

What two realms of existence does God create, and of what does He make them?

(See **2 Mac 7:28** and **Heb. 11:3** for help with the second part.)

*(God created two realms of existence: the heavens and the earth. He created spirit and matter out of nothing, and then formed the matter as He wanted. The Hebrew for create, **berah**, means literally "to create out of nothing." It is only ever applied to God. The Bible later confirms this in **2 Mac. 7:28**: "I beseech you, my child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see everything that is in them, and to recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed.")*

Who or what does God put in positions of dominion, and over what two realms are they to rule?

(In vs. 16, God makes "the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." Note that the sun and moon are not named. In the ancient world, the very words "sun" and "moon" were synonymous with the names of deities. In contrast, Genesis teaches that the sun and moon are not powers to be feared but created things with a God-given purpose in the universe. They are put in dominion over day and night - but have no jurisdiction over man or the earth. Psalm 19 tells us of another function: to tell the glory of God. When we gaze at them, we should recognize the power and beauty of God in them. The text says these lights (sun, moon, stars) are for "signs" and to mark out time and seasons. What might they be signs of? Think of the star that the magi followed to find the newborn King. Think also of the eclipse of the sun on Good Friday. They are elements used by God to communicate with His creation. Think also about the description of Mary that we see in Rev. 12:1: "Now a great sign appeared in the heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars." **Is it any wonder that the Church understands Mary to be the Queen of Heaven, since she wears as garments in this heavenly vision elements of dominion that we first meet in Genesis?** In vs. 26, Man is given dominion over the rest of creation: "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.")

Note that the very first thing God does for the living creatures (**vs. 22**) and for man and woman (**vs. 28**) after creating them is to bless them. In the context of this chapter, what does it mean for man and beast to have *God's blessing*?

(God's blessing of both man and animals includes a charge to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. In addition, man is charged with subduing the earth and having dominion over it. Dominion means "supreme authority; sovereignty." God, who is absolute king over all His creation, shares His authority with man by entrusting him with the earth and its resources, thus giving man the dignity of cooperating with Him in completing the work of creation. Man's dominion is not intended to be domination; he is rather to care for the earth, to oversee it, to work it and enjoy its fruits.)

(All that God made pleased and satisfied Him. Everything was filled with goodness, since it all came from God Himself. To be blessed by God, in this context, is to be pleasing in His sight. This is an important idea to grasp in this moment in Genesis. As Catholic students of Scripture, we will want to keep a very close eye on what becomes of this blessing that God has given to man. In some ways, the blessing of God-how we got it, how we lost it, and how we'll get it back-is the central focus of all salvation history. The entire Bible can be summed up in terms of God's blessing. In the Old Testament, the blessing of God (being pleasing in His sight) is given, lost, promised, prophesied, and pre-figured. In the New Testament, it is regained, preached, preserved, and prevails. Because of its importance in the rest of Scripture, linger here in Genesis 1 and soak in just how magnificent it was for man and beast to be blessed by God at the dawn of creation.)

Describe God based on what you have seen of Him in this chapter. Given this, what will it mean for man that he is made "in God's image" (vs. 26**)? In other words, what characteristics of God would you expect to show up in man that will set him apart from the rest of Creation?**

(As God thinks, plans, executes, and evaluates, man in His image should be expected to do the same. God's boundless creativity is a central aspect of His nature. Surely man will likewise be creative. All God creates is good and well-ordered; even so we would expect man to have an appreciation of goodness and order and to take pleasure in creating. The care God exhibits for creation leads us to expect compassion and care in man. The eternal nature of God indicates a capacity for eternal life in man. And the fact that God, although one, is not alone but exists in communion with the Word and the Spirit prepares us for the coming pronouncement in chapter 2 that "it is not good that the man should be alone.")

What additional information does **vs. 27 shed on the nature of God and His image in man? What does this tell us about the essential dignity of the sexes?**

(God, who is Spirit and thus neither male nor female, is nonetheless reflected in mankind only by male and female together. Man and woman are created "equal as persons and complementary as masculine and feminine" (CCC 372). Each has the inherent dignity of being created in God's image. In communion together, and particularly in the context of the family, they fully reflect the image of the Divine Family, which is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.)

What charge is included in God's blessing (vs. 28)? How does the charge given to man differ from that given to the animals?

(In asking man to reproduce and fill the earth, God is asking man to help complete that which He began to do in the beginning. In giving man the responsibility to be fruitful, He allows him to participate in the creation of human life. In giving him charge over the earth, God is vesting man with some of His own authority, in effect asking man to share in His work of ruling. Man's two-part vocation is thus a reflection of God Himself. It enables him to be what he was

(created to be: a creature made in God's image. And it is in fulfilling this vocation that he gives praise and glory to God.)

In what way do the two responsibilities God gives to man reflect the nature or image of God?

After blessing man and the animals and giving them their responsibilities, what gifts does God give them (**vs. 29-30**)? What kind of relationship between God and His creation does this provision establish?

(God gives them food to nourish and sustain them (vs. 29-30). God is the source not just of man's habitation, his abilities and responsibilities. He is the source of all man needs for his life to be sustained. It is of no small importance for Catholics to recognize this simple provision from God. In connecting Himself to the sources of food for man and beast, God shows Himself to be the true nourishment of all life. Is it any wonder, therefore, that worship of God in the Old Testament often included a festal meal, and in the Church, has as its central act, the provision of a heavenly meal for man, the Body and Blood of Christ?)

God, perfect in Himself, needs nothing to make Him complete or happy. Why then do you think He would create us and the universe? Does anything in **vs. 31** help us understand why we are here?

(It is difficult to answer this from Genesis 1 alone. But given God's self-sufficiency and limitless perfection, and having observed the great care with which God fashioned the earth for us, it is reasonable to assume we are here because He knew we would enjoy living and knowing Him. He created us for His good pleasure and our own. Theologian F.J. Sheed has this to say: "It is a new light upon the love of God that our gain could be a motive for his action. He knew that beings were possible who could enjoy existence, and he gave them existence. By existing they glorify him-but who is the gainer by that? Not God, who needs nothing from any creature. Only the creature, whose greatest glory is that he can glorify God.")

2. Review the steps of creation.

Show how God is not part of creation, but is the cause. If this is true God would be omnipresent (in all parts of creation at the same time.)

God as the creator is an infinite being, his creation, even though it is vast is still finite.

If God created time and space, as we see here in Genesis 1, He lives outside of them. It is a difficult concept to comprehend, isn't it? And yet Catholic life can be said to be pervaded with an element of "timelessness." Can you describe why that is true?

Explain how God made the heavens and the earth for Man to live on, just as we would build a home to live in. The first three days, giving His creation form, and the next three, filling this form with substance.

Creation is not a part of God. It is distinct and separate.

3. Explore the different accounts of creation by different cultures (Greek, Far Eastern, New Age) and theories (Evolution). Show how each falls short of the total cohesiveness of the Jewish account in Genesis.

Genesis and pagan tales of creation are very different. Pagan tales of creation begin with matter. Where does it come from? A creator can not be a part of the creation.

Pagan Tales describe the creation process in terms of a war among the gods, with the winners forming the cosmos out of the carcasses of the losers.

Pagan tales treat the sun, moon, and stars as deities.

Pagan tales have the gods at odds with man- man was created by the gods as an accident, or only to serve the gods for a specific purpose. These gods are antagonistic towards man, and all of these stories have a common theme of man's struggles against these gods and man's becoming godlike, like them.

Man's development was the effect of the gods "playing with" or "meddling" in the affairs of man. As such, man was not considered to be created in their image.

Conclusion

Reading the first chapter of Genesis is an experience different from reading any other passage of Scripture. Think about the significance of the fact that the beginning of our human story is told in poetic language. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) has written, "These words, with which Holy Scripture begins, always have the effect on me of the solemn tolling of a great old bell, which stirs the heart from afar with its beauty and dignity and gives it an inkling of the mystery of eternity" (*In the Beginning.*, Our Sunday Visitor, p. 11). Just as human poetry seeks to take the reader beyond the limits of ordinary language to a place of exquisite meaning, so this account in Genesis communicates to us something far more than science or chronological historical narrative could ever do. By the time we've read it all the way through, we find ourselves in a kind of beatitude. We are surrounded by the goodness of God in His creation, reflected in His careful ordering of all its elements and represented most clearly in His blessing of that which breathes the breath of life. The universe exists today through the imagination, power, and love of God. Genesis 1 convinces us that no other explanation fits all the data.

Yet the details of this chapter go beyond even that. They give us our first clues about the unique relationship that exists between God and man, the "crown of creation," as the Psalmist calls him. We recognize in the action of the Blessed Trinity during creation an intimation of a splendid communion within God. And as the verses in the chapter continue in their cadence, we discover that man is to be included in this communion. We see that he is to be in the image and likeness of God, reproducing in his earthly life Who God is in His essence. By sharing His image with man and imparting to him His goodness, God makes clear that this communion is one of lovers. Only love can explain the condescension of God to man. Only love will qualify as the appropriate response to it.