

Creation and Original Sin

RCIA Session 7

July 14, 2010

- Prayer – **Breaking Open the Word**
- Debrief Rite of Welcoming and Acceptance
- **Teaching/ Q&A**
- **Small Group Discussions**
- Next time – Paschal Mystery; Salvation/Redemption.
- Closing Prayer –

Let's go back to the beginning. Way back to the beginning. Back to God as creator of Heaven and Earth. An understanding of creation is of tremendous importance. It is the question of our origins. Where do we come from? Are we the result of chance or design? Are we simply super-intelligent animals, or are we something more? The questions of our origins are intimately linked to the questions of our end, or purpose. Why are we here? Where are we going? The answers to the questions regarding our origins will shed light on our eternal destiny.

The first thing our Faith teaches us is **why God creates**. God creates out of sheer goodness and love. Creation shows forth the glory of God. Everything that exists is the result of God's self-giving love, and it all has the ability to give glory to God.

God creates out of nothing. God did not need the help of any pre-existent matter in the act of creation. At the same time, God has not left creation on its own. Creation did not happen once for all. God continues to uphold and sustain creation. If God for a moment "forgot" about us, we would cease to exist. Our God is intimately involved in His creation. God's continual presence and guidance over creation is known as Divine Providence. God cares for the smallest details as well as great events of the world.

When it comes to the creation of the visible world, our primary scriptural witness is the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. There are some important truths emphasized by these accounts of creation. Nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God. Each creature possesses its own good and perfection; at each stage of creation, God declares it all good. There is a hierarchy of creatures; there is an order of less to more perfect within creation – algae,

acorns, apples, ants, antelope, and Adam. Human beings are the summit or high point of God's creative work. There is a solidarity among all creatures since they stem from the same origin that demands a certain care and respect for all of creation.

Questions often arise surrounding creation and evolution. What does the Church teach, and what can a Catholic believe about creation and evolution? We can summarize the Church's teachings briefly:

- 1) Genesis cannot be used as a scientific textbook that eliminates evolution all together. The Catechism points out that symbolic language was employed in the creation stories. While it is not necessary to believe in evolution, a Catholic may believe that the universe is a result of an evolutionary process. (CCC 337) However, the Church rejects theories such as random evolution (Darwinism) that eliminate divine providence or the role of an intelligent designer. *If* evolution occurred, it was directed by God, not random chance (CCC 295).
- 2) The entire universe, including the human race, is *not the result of random chance*, but of God's wisdom and loving design (CCC 295).
- 3) One need not hold that the world was created in six 24 hr. days. But, one may believe in a literal six day creation. The Church has no official position affirming one or the other. (CCC 337)
- 4) Humans are not simply a more advanced animal. Humans bear the image of God in a unique way (CCC 355).
- 5) Even *if* God created the bodies of the first humans through evolution, their souls, like all human souls, were immediately created by Him at their conception (CCC 366). Pope Pius XII taught that "the teaching authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions . . . take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—[but] the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God" (*Humani Generis* 36).
- 6) All humans share common first parents, so we have the same nature and origin, and belongs to the same human family (CCC 375).
- 7) The Fall from original holiness of our first parents was a real event. It left them and all their descendants in the state of original sin (CCC 390).

Humans are unique among all of creation. As Vatican II said, humans are "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake." Only humans are called to share in God's own life of love – to participate in the life of the Trinity. This was the reason for our creation, and it is the source of our fundamental human dignity.

The creation of the human person in the image and likeness of God affirms a number of things about who we are. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are capable of self-knowledge, of freely giving ourselves to another in love, and we are able to enter into communion with other persons. The human person is at once bodily and spiritual. The biblical story of creation expresses this in symbolic language when it affirms that "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." In Sacred Scripture the term "soul" often signifies human life or the entire human person. But "soul" also refers to the innermost aspect of humans - the spiritual principle in a person. The human body likewise shares in the dignity of "the image of God." It is the whole human person that is intended to become a temple of the Spirit. So the human person is a radical unity of body and soul. This is a truth that will become important when we discuss the Resurrection of the Body.

The first humans were not only created good, but were also established in friendship with God and in harmony with self and with creation. This total harmony with God, self, others, and all of creation is traditionally known as the preternatural gifts. The Church teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in what is called an original "state of holiness and justice." They were first of all called to share in the divine life. The first man was ordered in his whole being because he was free from any tendency toward sin. This entire harmony of original justice, given to humans as part of God's plan, was lost by the sin of our first parents.

[READ GENESIS 3 together]

It should be noted that Adam and Eve are not to be seen as mythical in nature. While the details of the account may not necessarily be historical, nevertheless, the Church teaches that we did indeed have two first parents.

The doctrine of original sin is the "reverse side" of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all. We cannot rid ourselves of Original Sin without also losing the mystery of Christ. The story of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a real event which took place at the beginning of the history of humankind.

Behind the sin of our first parents hides another voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition call this being a fallen angel, "Satan" or the "devil". The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God. The "fall" of these angels consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who in some way irrevocably rejected God and his reign.

Our first parents, tempted by the devil, let trust in God die in their hearts and, abusing the gift of freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what the first sin

essentially consisted of. All subsequent sin would be a similar disobedience toward God and failure to trust in his goodness.

Scripture portrays the consequences of this first sin. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God and have conceived a distorted image of Him. The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed. The control of the soul over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes strained, their relations to become marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken. Humans now had to work the ground for their food, and it would bring up thistles and thorns. Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for sin: death makes its entrance into human history.

All people are in a mysterious way implicated in Adam's sin. As St. Paul affirms: "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." Paul also contrasts the universality of sin and death with the universality of salvation in Christ. "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? There is a certain "unity of the human race" in which all of us are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a reality that we cannot fully understand. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected their human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will transmit a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. Original sin is therefore said to be "contracted" and not "committed." For us, Original Sin is a state and not an act. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted. It is wounded. The traditional consequences of Original sin are that the intellect is darkened and the will is weakened. We no longer clearly and instinctively know the truth, and we no longer choose the good with complete ease. We are subject to ignorance, suffering and death, and inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called "concupiscence."

[From CS Lewis]

I ask some of the younger children, "what would happen if I were on the moon right now, just as I am?" They yell all kinds of things, but basically the answer is that I wouldn't be doing very well at all. I am not naturally capable of living life on the moon. I am lacking something. I need a spacesuit. Then I tell them that Original Sin is like being born without your space suit. By ourselves, we can't live the life of Heaven. We are lacking something. We need sanctifying grace. Original Sin means we come into this world lacking sanctifying grace which we

need to live the life of Heaven. We receive that grace first through the sacrament of Baptism.

After the fall, we were not abandoned by God. On the contrary, in a mysterious way there is an immediate proclamation of the salvation to be won by God. Genesis 3:15 provide us with the words of God to the Serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." This passage in Genesis the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers.

The early Christian writers saw in this passage an announcement of the "New Adam" who, because he "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross", makes amends superabundantly for the disobedience, of Adam. Furthermore many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen the woman announced here as Mary, the mother of Christ, the "new Eve."

The doctrine of Original Sin might highlight for us our radical dependence on God. We come into this world in a state of needing the grace of God, and having no claim on it. As an infant, there is nothing we can do to merit the affection and love of our parents. It is a gift freely bestowed. The same is true with God. There is nothing we can do to win God's favor. Thanks be to God! Otherwise we would spend our lives trying to gain divine approval. Rather, as the baptism of an infant shows, our God pours out His graces like water on even his littlest ones. We should be consoled to know how readily our God freely gives us His graces, and how eager he is to bring us into His own eternal life.

Original Sin brought about the promise of a savior. At the Easter Vigil, the Exsultet proclaims: "O happy fault, Oh necessary fin of Adam. . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" In our next session, we will turn to this Redeemer, and the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Small Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What questions were you left with this session?
- 2) What was clarified for you?
- 3) What do you still struggle with?

- 4) When you hear yourself being described as created in the image and likeness of God, what comes to your mind? How should a person created in God's image live?
- 5) Why do you think some people are not comfortable with the teaching about Original Sin and their personal sins? St. Paul writes, "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do want" (Rom 7:19). He discovered an inner war between evil and good. In what ways could you identify with his analysis?
- 6) Why do you think some people think they can win salvation on their own? Why is that approach mistaken? Why is Jesus the answer to the need for salvation?
- 7) What are some practical ways you would reply to creationists and atheistic evolutionists? Why is the dialogue between religion and science necessary and valuable?