

Adult Catechism January 30 , 2017

Christ Our Pascha: God the Creator, the fall of Mankind, the coming of the Messiah

Part 1: God the Creator: What do we mean when we say that God is the Creator of heaven and earth? -- When we say that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, we mean that He made all things from nothing by His almighty power.

"All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing" (John 1:3) "For in him were created all things" (Col. 1:16).

In the beginning God alone lived. Then out of nothing, by His almighty power, He created heaven and earth, and all things in heaven and on earth. Only God can create; that is, He alone can make something out of nothing. Time began with this creation. Before it there was only eternity. "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity Thou art God" (Ps. 89:2).

God created heaven and earth, and everything in heaven and earth. By this is meant everything which is not God. "Heaven" refers to the angels and their abode; and "earth" to all the material universe, including the earth, stars, planets, and all things and beings in them. God created everything by an act of his will. "He spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created" (Ps. 32:9).

In its first book, Genesis, Holy Scripture tells the story of Creation. In the beginning all was void and empty and dark; that is, there was nothing but chaos, which God Himself had created. Then out of this chaos God brought about order and law, creating heaven and earth. "In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2).

In how many days did God create the world? -- God created the world in six days, resting on the seventh day. These "days" of creation were not necessarily days of twenty-four hours like those we have today, since our sun had not yet appeared. Catholic theologians commonly interpret them as long periods of time. Thus the "seventh day" is still going on. For Holy Scripture says that on that day God rested; that is, He ceased to create new kinds of things.

The Hebrew word for "day" may stand for a day, a week, a month, a century, or any indefinite period of time. Fundamentalism is an enemy of Science; it takes the "days" of Creation as of 24-hour periods, like the periods we call "days" in our time. Very probably the sacred writer divides creation into six days in order to consecrate each day of the week by connecting it with one or more of the Creator's works; and to impress on the Jews the divine command to sanctify the seventh day.

In the creation, God worked from the lower to the higher: He first made plants, and then He created the animals that would use them for food. Man was the crown of His earthly creations; all other works in the material universe, were for man's enjoyment and use.

On the first day, God said: "Be light made," and light was made. Then He divided light from darkness, and called the light Day and the darkness Night. On the second day, God made the sky or firmament and divided the waters. The "heaven" thus made is the material heaven in which the stars, the moon, and the sun pursue their courses.

On the third day, God made dry land to appear, bade it bring forth plants. In its account Holy Scripture concerns itself chiefly with our earth. Originally a fiery ball of gaseous matter, it gradually lost its heat, and land began to appear, apart from the sea. The moisture and warmth encouraged the development of organic life, the beginning of which had been implanted by God in the original primary matter.

On the fourth day, God made the sun, moon, and stars. On the fifth day He made creeping things, birds, and fishes. On the sixth day, He made beasts and cattle. Finally, "God created man to His own image." Man is different from the animals in his possession of reason and free will. Surpassing them all in dignity, he is the crown of God's creations, the one for whom the world had been made ready.

On the seventh day, God "rested ... from all His work which He had done." On the seventh day God ceased to make new kinds of things. This "seventh day" continues to the present; everything that is "made" now is a development or a combination of already existing matter. It is true that "nothing is new under the sun." However, God continues to work in this sense: that He preserves and governs created things, and that He creates souls for those to be born.

Is there no contradiction between the account in the book of Genesis, and the latest discoveries of science, concerning the origin of matter? -- No, there is not the least contradiction between the account in the book of Genesis, and the latest discoveries of science, concerning the origin of matter.

An apparent contradiction arises through the mistake of uninformed persons, who forget that the Church reads the Bible bearing in mind the principal object of the sacred writers. In writing the account of the creation, the sacred writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wished to impress upon the Jews (for whom he was writing) that there is but one God, and that He created the entire universe, living and lifeless.

At that time the Jews were surrounded by idolatrous peoples who believed in the existence of many gods, and worshipped all kinds of creatures, even the sun, moon, plants, animals, and images. In pursuing his aim, the sacred writer used the form that was most effective, under the circumstances, to convey his meaning. It is a popular form: that is, it relates historical events in popular expression and order.

The words used, while in themselves not scientifically exact, are in conformity with ordinary speech, and understandable by ordinary people. In the same way today we say, "The sun rises in the east", even when we know through the investigations of science that the sun does not "rise" at all. Events are set down in an order not necessarily scientific, but suited to the understanding of a primitive people, and therefore of all mankind. We must remember that the sacred writer was not aiming to teach physics or anthropology, but Faith. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc013.htm>

Part 2: The Angels What Which are the chief creatures of God? -- The chief creatures of God are angels and men. God created angels and men for His own external glory. Their creation was a reflection of His wisdom and greatness. By reason alone we cannot know that angels exist. However, reason indicates that in the orderly sequence of creatures from the lowest to the highest, there would be a greater gap between man and God, did not the angels exist. God created angels and men for their good and happiness. They find their happiness in their union with God. God did not create angels or men for His own happiness; He is perfectly happy in Himself alone.

What are Angels? -- Angels are created spirits, without bodies, having understanding and free will. Angels are spiritual beings superior to man and inferior to God; this is of faith. We do not know the number of angels, but we can infer from Holy Scripture that their number is very great. Before the creation of man, God created hosts of angels. They are pure spirits, without bodies, in contrast to men, who have both body and spirit. When angels or devils appear to men, they assume human form or some other visible shape. Thus the angels that appeared to the Blessed Virgin and to Zachary assumed human form. The devil that tempted Eve appeared as a serpent.

Even demons are pure spirits. They were angels before they became devils. The word "angel" means messenger, and angels have often been sent by God to make known His will to men. Even the devils do service to God, since God always turns the attacks of the devil to show forth more brightly His own glory.

What gifts did God bestow on the Angels when He created them? -- When God created the angels He bestowed on them great wisdom, power, and holiness. Angels are the most excellent beings created by God. They are nobler in nature than men. They know more, and have greater power. Of all God's creatures, angels resemble Him most. We can imply the knowledge of the angels from the words of Our Lords: "But of that day (the day of Judgment) and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). The power of angels was shown in Egypt when one destroyed all the first-born of the Egyptians; another angel destroyed the hosts of the Assyrian King, for blaspheming God.

The angels were not created equal. They rank according to the amount of gifts given, and the work assigned to them. In the Bible nine choirs of angels are mentioned: seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations, virtues powers, principalities, archangels, and angels.

Did all the angels remain faithful to God? -- Not all the angels remained faithful to God; some of them sinned. God gave free will to the angels, as He did to men. He put them to a test, in order to make them earn the happiness of heaven. We do not know the exact nature of the test which God gave the angels. In this trial, many angels, using their free will, refused to submit themselves to God; for this serious sin they were punished. "For God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but dragged them down by infernal ropes" (2 Pet. 2:4). Wherever the devils were later permitted to go, they had in a way their hell with them, for they were forever deprived of the love of God.

What happened to the angels who remained faithful to God? --The angels who remained faithful to God entered into the eternal happiness of heaven, and these are called good angels. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father" (Matt. 18:10). The good angels behold the face of God continually, praise and glorify Him, and are perfectly happy in His presence.

Angels are commonly represented with wings to show the speed with which they pass from place to place. They are also shown as small children to show their innocence and perpetual youth. They have harps to indicate their perpetual praise of God, and lilies, to symbolize their perfect purity.

When we say that the angels were in heaven before their test, we do not mean that they saw God. They were very happy where God had placed them, but they did not see God until they had been proved. How do the good angel help us? -- The good angels help us by praying for us, by acting as messengers from God to us, and by serving as our guardian angels. Our Lord Himself said of little children: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones for I tell you, their angels in heaven always behold the face of my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

The good angels are God's messengers, and often reveal God's will to man. The angel Raphael accompanied Tobias on his journey. The angel Gabriel was sent to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Annunciation. Angels appeared to the shepherds at the Nativity. An angel was sent to St. Joseph after the departure of the Magi, and after the death of Herod. Angels appeared to the women at Christ's sepulchre, and to Mary Magdalen. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc015.htm>

Part 3: Original Sin: What happened to Adam and Eve on account of their sin? --On account of their sin Adam and Eve lost sanctifying grace, the right to heaven, and their special gifts; they became subject to death, to suffering, and to a strong inclination to evil, and were driven from the Garden of Paradise.

Adam and Eve immediately lost God's abiding grace and friendship, their holiness and innocence: they lost sanctifying grace. This was the worst punishment. Having lost sanctifying grace, they lost the right to heaven, to see God. They lost their special gifts: they became subject to suffering and death. Their minds and wills were so weakened that they became inclined to evil, subjected to temptation. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:16-19).

God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. "And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure" (Gen. 3:23,24). Some wonder how the eating of one fruit could have been so grievous a crime. We must remember that God gave Adam and Eve every blessing. He only required them, as proof of their faithfulness, to abstain from eating the fruit of one tree.

Doubtless Paradise was filled with trees having more delicious fruit than the forbidden tree. Pride and disobedience and ingratitude caused them to sin. They defied God, and despised His threats. They wanted to be as Powerful and great as God.

What has happened to us on account of the sin of Adam? --On account of the sin of Adam, we, his descendants, come into the world deprived of sanctifying grace and inherit his punishment, as we would have inherited his gifts had he been obedient to God. "Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, and thus death has passed into all men" (Rom. 5:12).

This sin in its is called original sin. It is the state in which every descendant of Adam comes into the world, totally deprived of grace, through inheriting the punishment, not of Adam's personal sin, but of his sin as head of the human race. This sin is called original because it comes down to us through our origin, from Adam. Thus all men are born in sin, that is, they are born without the friendship of God, and with no right to heaven. Original sin does not come to us from Eve. but from Adam alone, since God made him representative and head of the whole human race. Eve was punished for her disobedience, as Adam was, but did not pass on her guilt to all mankind. Our original sin comes from our first father.

Because of original sin, heaven was closed to all men until the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord instituted the sacrament of Baptism in order to restore to us the right to heaven that Adam had lost. A person after baptism is in the state of grace and free from sin. If he dies immediately after baptism, even if he had committed sins, he goes straight to heaven. His sins and their punishment are all forgiven him.

What are the chief punishments of Adam which we inherit through original sin? --The chief punishments of Adam which we inherit through original sin are: death, suffering, ignorance, and a strong inclination to sin. By original sin we became subject to disease and death. This was part of the punishment God laid on Adam. "In what day soever you shall eat of it, you shall die the death" (Gen. 2:17).

Our whole nature became inclined to evil. Our reason is in perpetual conflict with our passions. Even after our souls are cleansed of original sin by baptism, the corruption of our nature and other punishments, such as sickness, evil inclinations, etc., remain. "The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil" (Gen. 8:21). "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17)

Is God unjust in punishing us on account of the sin of Adam? --God is not unjust in punishing us on account of the sin of Adam, because original sin does not take away from us anything to which we have a strict right as human beings, but only the free gifts which God in His goodness would have bestowed on us if Adam had not sinned. All mankind must suffer for the sin of Adam because he was the head and representative of the whole human family. In much the same way. the ruler of a country represents the whole people. He declares war or makes peace, and the people are affected by his acts. When Alfonso XIII of Spain was dethroned, his children lost their right to the throne through no fault of their own. So also the children of a rich man who goes bankrupt lose all the inheritance they hoped for, through no fault of theirs.

We should have shared in Adam's blessings of soul and body without any merit of our own, if he had not sinned. In the same way we share in his guilt. If Adam had not sinned, we would have been born in the state of holiness and grace that had been his. Each man, however, would

have been free to commit actual sin, and to be cast into hell. However, not being the head of the human race, he would not have transmitted his sin to all mankind.

Was any human person ever preserved from original sin? --The Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved from original sin in view of the merits of her Divine Son, and this privilege is called the Immaculate Conception. "And when the angel had come to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women'" (Luke 1:28). From the very first moment of her conception the Blessed Virgin was preserved from all stain of original sin. She was conceived and born without original sin. God, having ordained that Mary was to be the Mother of His Son, could not permit her soul to lack for a single instant all those graces that would make her most pleasing to Him. Our Blessed Mother's soul was created as pure and spotless as the soul of Eve. Where Eve committed sin and lost her spotlessness, our Mother Mary kept herself pure and spotless to the end of her life. St. John the Baptist was cleansed from original sin while he was still in the womb of his mother. He was born free from sin, but he was, like us, conceived in sin. Taken from <http://www.catholicbook.com/AgredaCD/MyCatholicFaith/mcfc020.htm>

Part 4: The Promise of the Messiah: Did God abandon man after Adam fell into sin?

--God did not abandon man after Adam fell into sin, but promised to send into the world a Saviour to free man from his sins and to reopen to him the gates of heaven. God could have abandoned man as a consequence of Adam's sin; then the human race would have suffered eternal separation from Him. The promise was first made to Adam before God sent him out of Paradise. God said to the serpent who had tempted Eve: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head" (Gen. 3:15) In this passage, the woman spoken of is the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her seed is Our

Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Redeemer promised by God. God said that there would be complete enmity between Our Lord with His Mother on one side, and the devil with his followers on the other.

This promise was renewed several times to the Patriarchs of the Old Testament: to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. Because Abraham remained true to the worship of God in the midst of idolatry, God led him to Canaan. As a reward for his obedience, God promised, "I will make of thee a great nation ... and in thee shall all the kindred of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2,3). This promise was repeated twice.

The same promise "in thy seed shall all the nations be blessed" was repeated to Abraham's son Isaac, and to Isaac's son Jacob. Finally, hundreds of years later, God commanded the prophet Nathan to repeat to King David the very same promise, "He shall build a house to My name, and I will establish his kingdom forever" (2 Kings 7:13)

Later, God sent the Prophets. Through them He foretold many things about the Redeemer: about His birth, His Person, His sufferings. His death, and His final glory. God enlightened the Prophets so that they could speak in His name to the Jews or Israelites' the descendants of Abraham. There were about seventy prophets, the last being Malachias, who lived some 450 years before Christ.

God chose the Jews as the people among whom the promised Saviour would live; for this reason we call the Jews the "chosen people". God prepared them for the coming of the Saviour: by heavy trials, by severe laws, by miracles, by prophecies. The selection of the Jews did not mean rejection by God of the other nations. Every renewal of God's promise recalled blessings in which all were to share. Even among other nations there were just men, In Greece, Socrates spoke against the worship of idols. Holy Job lived in Arabia. The Magi were of the East. Vergil the poet prayed the virgin-born Son to come and reign over His people.

Why did God wait thousands of years before sending the Redeemer? --God wished men to realize the enormity of sin. God wished men to see how low they could sink without His help. He wanted the world to prepare for the Redeemer. Men became so wicked that God destroyed all in the Deluge, except Noe and his family. God permitted men to sink into the deepest misery, so that they might be roused to a longing for the promised Saviour. When the Saviour at last came, all nations were sunk in idolatry and wickedness except the Jews. Even among the Jews there was continuous dissension and sin.

From the time of Adam the true religion was preserved till the advent of the promised Saviour by the patriarchs, prophets and other holy men inspired by God to teach and lead his Chosen People.

In spite of the imperfection of the old religion, there was always only one true religion. It was but a shadow of the perfection that was to come, but was the true religion before Christ: the Jewish Faith.

Who is the Saviour of all men? --The Saviour of all men is Jesus Christ. Men would know the Saviour by certain signs which God revealed through the Prophets. Of His advent the Prophets spoke: The Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, when the Jews were no longer free.

"And Thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel: and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (Mich. 5:2). "The scepter shall not be taken away from Juda, nor a ruler from his thigh, till he come that is to be sent, and he shall be the expectation of nations" (Gen. 49:10)