

# Creation

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Catholic Truth Society No.do0330 (1963)

What does the Catholic Church teach about creation? Has the Bible been proved wrong? Will it be necessary to revise traditional Christian doctrine? Questions like these are being asked in these days when scientists are probing ever more deeply into how all things came to be.

## 1. OFFICIAL TEACHING

About the year 382 Pope St Damascus presented a list of the principal errors of his time to a local church council in Rome. Pope St Celestine I, who reigned from 422 to 432, considered as law the Canons made by that Roman Council. Modern authors regard them as definitions of Faith. Here is one of them: 'If anyone denies that the three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are true Persons, equal, eternal, containing all things visible and invisible, that they are omnipotent, judge all things, give life to all things, make all things, and conserve all things; he is a heretic.'

In 1215 the Fourth Council of the Lateran defined that the three divine Persons 'are the one and only principle of all things - Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who, by His almighty power, from the very beginning of time has created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe. And afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders, as he is composed of body and spirit.'

All is summed up by the Canons of the Vatican Council of 1870.

'If anyone denies that there is one true God, Creator and Lord of things visible and invisible; let him be anathema.

'If anyone dares to assert that nothing exists except matter; let him be anathema.

'If anyone does not admit that the world and everything in it, both spiritual and material, have been produced in their entire substance by God out of nothing or says that God did not create with a will free from all necessity, but that He created necessarily, just as He necessarily loves Himself or denies that the world was made for the glory of God; let him be anathema.'

## 2. THE BIBLE AND CREATION

These are official statements of doctrines which are very clearly found in the Bible. The name God gave Himself when He spoke to Moses from the burning bush was 'I am who I am'. Israel was to address Him by the name Yahweh (He is) which express His absolute and unchangeable being in all His perfection and power. All other things are nothing in comparison with Him: 'I, the Lord: this is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to graven things' (Isaias [i.e. Isaiah] 42:8, cf. Exod. 3:14ff.; Isaias 40:17). Elsewhere the name Adonai implies that God is the Lord and Proprietor of heaven and earth because He made them (cf. Ps. 88:12; Esther 13:10ff.; Matt. 11:25). [We use the Douay for numbering the Psalms.]

(Footnote: In a booklet of this length it is impossible to print out all the Scripture texts in full. The reader should be careful to consult them.)

The very first verse of the Bible, according to the traditional interpretation of Jews and Christians, teaches directly that God created the world out of nothing. No material of any sort is named from which heaven and earth were made. Creation took place 'in the beginning', that is at the point in time before which there was nothing apart from God. 'Heaven and earth' means all that is not God. The Hebrew word, bara, means 'to create'; it is used almost exclusively of God's activity; only once (Gen. 1:27) is it used when God produces out of something already existing; its use through-out the Bible is to express only creation out of nothing (cf. Ps. 123:8; 145:6; 32:9). Other expressions of Jewish belief will be found in 2 Macc. 7:28; Wis. 1:14; Job 12:7-9; Ecclus. 18:1; Isaias 40:25ff.; 42:5; 44:24; 45:11ff.; 48:12ff.; Jer. 27:5; Zacharias [i.e. Zechariah] 12:1 etc.

Right reason proves the existence of God as Being on whom all other beings depend. That proof includes proof that God made from nothing everything that exists outside Himself.

### 3. DIVINE WISDOM

Creation is the work of divine Wisdom. God 'made all things in Wisdom.' (Ps. 103:24). The Bible depicts Wisdom as a counsellor by God's side at creation (Prov. 8:27ff.; 3:19ff.). Creation reflects God's eternal, unchangeable thoughts, which contain finite replicas of His infinite perfections. There are no parts in God; everything is infinite, equal to His divine essence; but the one single divine idea, divine wisdom, is reflected in whatever God creates. Only in that sense do we speak of there being many divine ideas.

Why did God create? The Vatican Council has defined: 'In order to manifest His perfection through the benefits which He bestows on creatures - not to intensify His happiness nor to acquire any perfection - this one and only true God, by His goodness and almighty Power and by a completely free decision... created.' God's motive was His goodness: His purpose was His glorification. His goodness moved Him to mirror His attributes in other beings by finite images. There is nothing outside God which could move Him to create. As St Thomas Aquinas wrote: 'Only imperfect agents act from need... God alone is the most perfectly liberal giver; He does not act for His own profit, but only for His own goodness' (cf. Prov. 16:4).

### 4. FOR GOD'S GLORY

We have already quoted the Canon of the Vatican Council condemning anybody who denies that God created for His own glory. He willed to reveal His perfections and from this to derive glory. He wanted creatures to share in His goodness and to derive bliss from so doing, but this purpose must ultimately be for His own glory. We must not apply our human ideas too exactly to God. God cannot be selfish in the blameworthy human sense; God is absolutely limitless independence and self-sufficiency; these are divine attributes, identical with the very Being of God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and final purpose of all things as Scripture tells us: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'; 'of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things; to Him be glory for ever. Amen' (Apoc. 1:8; Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10; Prov. 16:4). Remember that the things God makes cannot increase His perfection; that is infinite. But glory means the praise and splendour which belong to Him because the intelligent creatures He has made know and praise His goodness and the rest of creation displays it. The bestowing of good on creatures is a secondary purpose of creation; God did not act primarily to bring that about. He could not do that. Just because He is infinite Being He created firstly to reveal His perfection and only secondarily for the good of the

things created. The Bible stresses that the created world should serve mankind but always subordinately to God's glorification (cf. Gen. 1:28ff.; Ps. 8:6; Apoc. 4:11). Men are to find their ultimate happiness in knowing and loving God, that is in giving Him glory.

## 5. CREATION, THE TRINITY, FREEDOM

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost are one single, common principle of creation. As we read in Scripture: 'The Son cannot do anything of Himself, but what He sees the Father doing: for what things soever He does, these the Son also does in like manner... I am in the Father and the Father in me. The words that I speak to you, I speak not of myself. But the Father who abides in me, He does the works' (John 5:19; 4:10). 'As the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are inseparable, so they work inseparably' say St Augustine.

God created freely. Nothing, either within Himself or outside, forced Him to create. That has been defined by the Vatican Council of 1870. God was free to create or not to create. Many texts prove this: Ps. 134:6; Apoc. 4:11; Ps. 32:6; Wis. 9:1; 11:26; Eph. 1:11 etc. Some have believed that God's essential goodness forced Him to create. This is not so, because God's goodness eternally communicated itself in a most perfect manner within the Godhead through His being Three in One. His goodness moved Him to create; it did not compel Him. Such compulsion would imply a lack of freedom incompatible with God's infinite perfection.

God was free to create this world or any other. He was not bound to create absolutely the best of all possible worlds. His own happiness and perfection cannot be increased by any world; they are already infinite. His divine power must not be limited; only what is impossible in itself (e.g. a square circle) is impossible to God. We must believe that the present world is the best for the purpose God had in view in creating it.

## 6. A GOOD CREATION

God has created a good world. Here is a definition of the Council of Florence (1442): 'When God willed in His goodness He created all creatures both spiritual and corporeal. These creatures are good because they were made by the Supreme Good, but they are changeable because they were made from nothing. The Church asserts that there is no such thing as the nature of evil, because every nature, in so far as it is a nature, is good.' Support for this is found in Gen. 1:31; Eccles. 39:21; 1 Tim. 4:4. Because He is infinite goodness God could not create a world that was morally bad; moral evil could not begin in infinite holiness. It is just as impossible for God to create evil as it is for Him to create a square circle.

When we imagine God at work we tend to think of Him in a human way. It is just as well to pause here and go back over the above pages always bearing in mind this one over-riding fact, that God is absolutely, infinitely self-sufficient. He satisfies Himself completely by His nature; nothing whatever can be added to His perfection or his happiness; creation could not be, as it were, an additional luxury for Him, the little extra He needed to display His goodness. No; whatever exists outside God must be for God ultimately; that is why it was made; in that it finds its own perfection; but that perfection cannot add anything to God's perfection. St John tells us that God loved the world (3:16). Before anything outside of Himself existed God knew of all the possible things He might create. We do not know of them because our minds are not infinite like God's. He was free to make some of them or none, ultimately He could act only for Himself; yet He knew that whatever He made would reflect His perfections. A gramophone record does not add to the perfection of the symphony recorded but it reflects the perfection of the performers. The record cannot take pleasure

in the fact that it reflects perfection; man can be happy in existing and portraying the attributes of God. God knew that when, out of all the things He might have created, He freely chose to create man. But we are anticipating.

## 7. CREATION - ETERNAL OR DELEGATED?

We have seen that God has told us that He created all things outside Himself and why He did it. He has told us that once the world was not and then it began to be (John 17:5; Eph. 1:4; Ps. 101 :26 etc.). But is it possible that there could be a created world without a beginning? St Thomas Aquinas taught that while it is an article of faith that God created the world, it is known only by revelation and cannot be proved by reason that creation could not be eternal. 'By faith alone do we hold, and by no demonstration can it be proved, that the world did not always exist... It cannot be demonstrated that man, or heaven, or a stone were not always... That the world began to exist is an object of faith, but not of demonstration or science.' On the other hand St Bonaventure and his followers believe that an eternal world creation implies a contradiction, for creation out of nothing means to have being after not having had being, first not to be and then to be. That cannot be eternal. This is the general teaching of the Fathers of the Church, for example St Athanasius who wrote: 'Even if God can always create, still the created things could not always be; for they are out of non-being, and were not, before they became.'

Is it possible that God could delegate the power to create out of nothing? In general the answer is 'No', although some have disagreed. It is of faith that God alone created the world. Scripture clearly teaches so (Isaias 44:24; Heb. 3:4; Ps. 88:12; John 1:3; Apoc. 4:11 etc.) and the Fourth Lateran Council defined it. It is commonly believed that no creature from its own power can create something out of nothing. The Fathers of the Church universally taught that no creature can create from nothing. The act of creation demands infinite power whereas creatures have only power which is finite.

## 8. GOD PRESERVES HIS CREATION

God keeps all created things in existence. 'By His providence God watches over and governs all the things that He made, reaching from end to end with might and disposing all things with gentleness (Wis. 8:1). For "all things are naked and open to His eyes" (Heb. 4:13), even those things which are going to occur by the free action of His creatures.' Thus the Vatican Council of 1870. This intervention of God is (1) constant, (2) casual [is causal meant?] and (3) immediate, that is not merely through secondary causes. St Thomas puts it like this: 'The preservation of things by God is a continuation of that action whereby He gives existence; which action is without either motion or time.' For Scriptural proof we turn to Col. 1:17: 'By Him all things consist', Heb. 1:3: 'He upholds all things by the word of His power' and Wis. 11:26: 'How could anything endure if You would not, or be preserved, if not called by You?' (cf. also John 5:17; Acts 17:28). Commenting on John 5:17, 'My Father works until now; and I work', St Augustine wrote: 'God works constantly; all created things would perish if His working were withdrawn.' Creatures depend on the Creator not merely for their becoming, that is at a certain moment passing from non-existence to existence, but for their existence and every moment of it.

Could God annihilate His creatures? Yes, He could withdraw His conserving power. At a beck He could destroy the whole world (2 Mach. 8:18). But he has told us that 'He does not will to annihilate His creatures' [see Ezekiel 18]: 'God has not pleasure in the destruction of the living. For He created all things that they might be' (Wis. 1:13ff.). We would expect that God, being infinitely wise and

good, would not annihilate the creatures He has made to mirror His perfections and so give Him glory (cf. Wis. 11:27; Prov. 1:4; 3:14).

## 9. GOD'S CO-OPERATION IN OUR ACTIONS

Can we act without God's immediate co-operation? The Church has made no solemn definition as to whether God does in fact co-operate immediately in all His creatures do but the common opinion is that God does co-operate and does so immediately, that is without necessarily employing secondary agents. In the official language of the Roman Catechism: 'God, by means of a most intrinsic power, impels everything that moves and acts to its movement and activity.' This teaching finds strong support in Scripture: 'Lord... You have wrought all our works for us' (Isa. 26:12) and 'In Him we live and move and are' (Acts 17:28).

Dare we probe this a little more deeply? There is a saying of the philosophers that operation follows being. It means more than that we can learn what a thing is from its works. It includes also this truth - that what depends on God for its being must also depend on Him in its activity. God is His being; His activity is also His being. There is no division in Him. Everything outside God depends on God for its being. That includes the activity or movement of all creatures; it has real being and so must be caused by God. Moreover, God is the cause of the universe, with absolute dominion over all things. By what reason should the activity of His creatures be exempt from His immediate influence? How could they be without Him? St Thomas sums the matter up in four points: God is the cause of the action of every creature, including man: (1) in so far as He creates it;

(2) in so far as He conserves it;

(3) in so far as He moves it to act and

(4) uses it as an instrument.

## 10. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Through His providence God protects and guides all He has created. This has been defined by the Vatican Council of 1870 in the words we have already quoted (see section 8). Scripture is saturated with references to God's providence. We will divide the texts into four groups. Much consolation will come from studying them.

(a) In general: Deut. 33:26 ff.; Judith 9:5; Eccles. 7:15; Ecclus. 11:14; 16:26-30; Matt. 20:15.

(b) In so far as God's providence cares for us: Deut. 8:5; Job 10:12; Pss. 90:4, 11, 12; 110:5; 135:1, 25; 144:15, 16; 145:7; Wis. 11:26; 12:13; and especially our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 6:28ff.; 10:29ff.; 1 Pet. 5:7.

(c) In so far as God's providence orders the elements and all things for man's welfare: Gen. 8:21ff.; Job 5:8ff. ; 28:24ff.; 36:27ff.; 37:6ff.; Pss. 64:10ff., 66:6ff.; 88:10; 103:13ff., 118:90ff.; 146:7ff.; Wis. 14:1-5; Ecclus. 43:26-28; Jer. 5:24; Amos 5:8; Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:16.

(d) In so far as God's providence cares for the brute creation: Job 38:41; Ps. 103:10-29; 144:15-16; 146:7, 9; Prov. 6:6-8; Matt. 6:26; 10:29.

God is the universal Cause of all things: every other cause is subordinate. Nothing can happen which God has not foreseen, desired or at least permitted. He cannot be taken by surprise; there can be no accidents. His plan is carried out with absolute certainty. It will help if we think of this universal governance as the action of infinite Love and realize that not the slightest thing can happen in the whole of creation which is not the gift of infinite Love. Even sin is permitted by

infinite Love and those who are its victims are meant to use its effects as instruments for saving their souls.

God's providence cannot change because His will cannot change. Does not prayer change God's plan? If it does not, how can it be of any use? The answer to the first question is 'No'; all prayer has been foreseen by God from all eternity; it has its place as a secondary cause in God's planning; it has all been taken into account. It is far from useless.

## 11. THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

How did God create? To what extent are we bound to accept what the Bible says about the six days of creation? Fuller discussion on that point and also on evolution will be found in other booklets published by the Catholic Truth Society. (Footnote: The Six Days of Creation, by Edmund H. Sutcliffe S.J. [No. Sc 31], and Evolution Today, by Rev. Aidan Pickering, M.A. [No. R 160].) Here I will summarize the teaching of the Church.

We believe that the Bible is God's inspired word. The human authors wrote down what God willed them to write and nothing else. But it is important to distinguish between religious and moral truths written in the Bible and other data, which may be scientific, historical or profane. In itself revelation extends only to religious and moral truths; other matters are God's word only in so far as they are connected with religious and moral truths. All are without error, but we must remember that the sacred authors could write only in the language of their day, equipped with the ordinary secular knowledge of the day. They were not writing as scientists; they were using language suitable for the ordinary people of the time. All truth comes from God, revealed religious truth and scientific truth; therefore, there can be no contradiction between them.

The Vatican Council of 1870 puts it like this: 'Although faith is above reason, yet there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, because it is the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith and has put the light of reason into the human soul.'

God cannot deny Himself any more than the truth can contradict the truth. However, the chief source of this merely apparent contradiction lies in the fact that dogmas of faith have not been understood and explained according to the mind of the Church or that deceptive assertions of opinions are accepted as axioms of reason. Therefore, 'We define that every assertion opposed to the enlightened truth of faith is entirely false.'

## 12. DECREES OF THE BIBLICAL COMMISSION

In 1902 Pope Leo XIII established in Rome the Biblical Commission which has the double purpose of promoting Biblical studies and of safeguarding the Scriptures against attack. Its decisions have great authority but they are neither infallible nor unalterable.

Here is what the Biblical Commission has stated about creation and the six days of Genesis:

1 - The first three chapters of Genesis contain narratives of real events, no myths, no mere allegories or symbols of religious truths, no legends.

2 - The literal historical sense of the rest of Genesis may not be questioned when it touches on such fundamental points of the Christian religion as the creation of all things, accomplished by God in the beginning of time, the special creation of man, the formation of the first woman from the first man, the unity of the human race, the original happiness of our first parents in the state of justice, integrity and immortality, the command given to man by God as a test of obedience, the

transgression of the divine command at the persuasion of the devil in the form of a serpent, the degradation of our first parents from that primeval state of innocence, and the promise of a future redeemer.

3 - It is not necessary to understand all individual words and sentences in the literal sense. Passages which are variously interpreted by the Fathers and by the theologians may be interpreted according to one's own intelligence provided that one submits to the judgement of the Church and the dictates of the Faith.

4 - The sacred writer did not intend to represent the intrinsic make-up of things with scientific accuracy nor the succession of works, but wished to impart a popular knowledge suitable to the idiom and the perception of his time: therefore, the interpretation is not to be measured by a strictly scientific mode of expression.

5 - The word 'day' need not be taken in the literal sense of a natural day of 24 hours, but can also be understood as a longer space of time.

Three other important authoritative documents must be quoted here. On January 16th, 1948, the secretary of the Biblical Commission sent a letter, approved by Pope Pius XII, to Cardinal Suhard, Archbishop of Paris, as follows : 'To declare a priori that these narratives (i.e. in the first eleven chapters of Genesis) do not contain history in the modern sense of the word might easily be understood to mean that they do not contain history in any sense, whereas they do actually relate in simple and figurative language, adapted to the intelligence of less educated men, the fundamental truths underlying the divine plan of salvation. And they are a popular description of the origins of the human race and of the chosen people.'

The second document is the encyclical letter, *Humani generis*, published by Pope Pius XII on August 12th, 1950. Here is a quotation from the translation published by the Catholic Truth Society: 'With history; there are some who make bold to overstep the warning landmarks which the Church has laid down. One especially regrettable tendency is to interpret the historical books of the Old Testament with overmuch freedom. In vain do the exponents of this method appeal, for their defence, to the letter recently received by the Archbishop of Paris from the Pontifical Commission on Biblical Studies. It was clearly laid down in that letter that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, although it is not right to judge them by modern standards of historical composition, such as would be applied to the great classical authors, or to the learned of our own day, do nevertheless come under the heading of history: in what exact sense, it is for the further labours of the exegete to determine.

'These chapters have a naïf, symbolical way of talking, well suited to the understanding of a primitive people. But they do disclose to us certain important truths, upon which the attainment of our eternal salvation depends, and they do also give a popularly-written description of how the human race, and the chosen people in particular, came to be. It may be true that these old writers of sacred history drew some of their material from the stories current among the people of their day. So much may be granted; but it must be remembered on the other side that they do so under the impulse of divine inspiration, which preserved them from all error in selecting and assessing the material they used.

'These excerpts from current stories, which are found in the sacred books, must not be put on a level with mere myths, or with legend in general. Myths arise from the untrammelled exercise of the imagination; whereas in our sacred books even in the Old Testament, a love of truth and a cult of

simplicity shine out, in such a way as to put these writers on a demonstrably different level from their profane contemporaries.'

On June 20th, 1961, the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome issued a warning to the effect that 'through praise-worthy enthusiasm for Biblical studies, assertions are being spread in many quarters which cast doubt on the genuine historical truth of Holy Scripture and its objectivity...' It goes on to say that such assertions and opinions are causing concern among both pastors and faithful. Therefore all of those who deal with the Sacred Scriptures, either in writing or orally, 'should be warned to treat such subject matter with due discretion and reverence, and always to have before their eyes the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church and the mind and teaching authority of the Church...'

The writer of the opening chapters of the Bible clothed religious truth about creation in the language of his day. He applied human terms and ways to God. For example, the process of creation is represented as a scheme parallel to the picture of a human working week. The author wanted to establish the working week and the Sabbath rest on God's example.

### 13. CREATION AND EVOLUTION

What must a Catholic believe concerning evolution? He must believe that when man comes to be there is a special act by God, which brings into existence a spiritual soul. Evolution which assumes an eternal, uncreated material from which all living things, man included, developed is contradictory to what God has revealed. We have already seen that matter is not eternal and that God created everything outside of Himself. He made matter out of nothing.

May a Catholic believe that God created something from which eventually all material things developed in virtue of powers implanted by Him, and that when matter had developed sufficiently in certain part, God created spiritual, immortal souls which He put into animal bodies, thus transforming them into the first man and woman? Yes, that may be reconciled with what is found in the Bible. Here is a summary of the Church's position, again from *Humani generis*: 'The teaching of the Church leaves the doctrine of evolution an open question, as long as it confines its speculations to the development, from other living matter already in existence, of the human body. (That souls are immediately created by God is a view which the Catholic faith imposes on us).'

It is most important that these extracts from authoritative statements of doctrine by the highest authority in the Church should be studied carefully, sentence by sentence. On evolution the letter continues: 'In the present state of scientific and theological opinion, this question may be legitimately canvassed by research, and by discussion between experts on both sides. At the same time, the reasons for and against either view must be weighed and adjudged with all seriousness, fairness, and restraint; and there must be a readiness on all sides to accept the arbitrament of the Church, as being entrusted by Christ with the right to interpret the Scriptures, and the duty of safeguarding the doctrines of the faith. There are some who take rash advantage of this liberty of debate, by treating the subject as if the whole matter were closed - as if the discoveries hitherto made, and the arguments based on them, were sufficiently certain to prove beyond doubt the development of the human body from other living matter already in existence. They forget, too, that there are certain references to the subject in the sources of divine revelation, which call for the greatest caution and prudence in discussing it.'

### 14. THE FIRST MAN AND WOMAN



It is of faith that the first man was created by God. His soul was made directly by God out of nothing. According to the immediate, literal sense of the narrative in Genesis, his body was made directly by God from inorganic matter, from the slime of the earth. That cannot be maintained with certainty, But there is a possibility that God breathed a living soul into what was originally an animal body. This is quite against the letter of Genesis, nor was it taught by the early Christian writers. The theory that man's body evolved through the animal kingdom is a modern one, but it can be reconciled with the Bible story. The essential inspired truth is that man's body and soul were created by God: connected with that is the less essential fact of how it happened. We must accept the literal teaching of Genesis of the actual fact of creation but for sufficiently weighty reasons we may reject the literal meaning on the related matter of how this creation came about. It is for science to show that those reasons are cogent and convincing.

Are we bound to believe that Eve's body was directly created by God from that of Adam? The decision of the Biblical Commission on this point has been quoted but many modern scholars have reservations about it. They argue that what is being stressed is really the special relationship between man and woman and that the inspired author is picturing woman symbolically made from man's flesh and bone.

#### 15. FROM ONE SINGLE PAIR

Polygenism is the theory that various races of men have come from several separate stems. On this Pope Pius XII gives firm guidance in *Humani generis*: 'There are other conjectures, about polygenism (as it is called), which leave the faithful no such freedom of choice. Christians cannot lend their support to a theory which involves the existence after Adam's time, of some earthly race of men, truly so called, who were not descended ultimately from him, or else supposes that Adam was the name given to some group of our primordial ancestors. It does not appear how such views can be reconciled with the doctrine of original sin, as this is guaranteed to us by Scripture and tradition, and proposed to us by the Church. Original sin is the result of a sin committed, in actual historical fact, by an individual man named Adam, and it is a quality native to all of us, only because it has been handed down by descent from him (cf. Rom. 5:12-19).' That the whole human race came from one single pair has never been infallibly defined but it is necessarily supposed if the doctrines of original sin and redemption are to be rightly understood. The proof is clear in Genesis: 'There was not a man to till the earth' (Gen. 2:5); 'Adam called the name of his wife, Eve; because she was the mother of all the living' (Gen. 3:20); 'He made of one all mankind to dwell upon the whole face of the earth' (Acts 17:26. See also Wis. 10:1; Rom. 5:12ff., 1 Cor. 15:21ff.; Heb. 2:11).

#### 16. MEN ON MARS?

In our day men are making excursions into outer space; they talk of landing on Venus, Mars or the moon. How will Christianity be affected if people are discovered living on other worlds, within or without our solar system? Not at all. Everything which exists, even if there are a hundred million solar systems, has been created out of nothing by God and is ruled by His providence. If men exist on other worlds God will have provided for them in a way befitting His boundless wisdom, justice, goodness and love. Their spiritual history may be like or unlike ours. But Christianity will not be affected by whatever may be discovered. God's revelation about man's creation affects this world alone.

#### 17. MYSTERIOUS AND TIMELESS

My main concern has been to state simply and, as far as possible, in the words of authority, the teaching of the Catholic Church about creation. What has been written will fill the thoughtful reader with deep admiration for the attributes of God shown in his creation. 'Creation' as we have been studying it is something, entirely beyond our natural experience. Human 'creators' of any kind work on something already existing; even their thoughts are but passing modifications of their minds. When we create we really only change something which already existed; when God created He willed and, by the power of His will alone, things came into existence where absolutely nothing had been before. God's creation is not the transformation of one thing into another; it is not something which comes out from His own being; it is not action on or about what already exists. It means that where nothing had been there is now something, and that something is not God nor a part of God; it has its own being, its own distinctive nature and it depends on God entirely for its future existence. This is completely beyond the vision of physical science.

In the last paragraph but one I wrote the words 'created out of nothing'. They are self-contradictory but they are necessary to get as near as possible to what we mean by God's creation. God did not create out of nothing as a dressmaker creates out of something. He did not work on nothing and make something out of it. God produced something in its entirety where absolutely nothing had existed before, apart from Himself.

I said, too, that creation is completely beyond the vision of physical science. Why? Because it is timeless. There is no halfway mark between being and non-being; creation does not mean that something gradually grows from nothing; it must be instantaneous. timeless, immeasurable. Physical science deals only with things which exist in time, with the succession of one state after another, with change or movement. Timelessness, production without movement, increase or succession, cannot be the subject of physical experimentation. The philosopher may deal with them but not the chemist or physicist.

Creation is, in fact, a mystery. Reason tells us that it must have happened; theology that it did happen. But we can never forget that we are dealing with a Creator who is infinitely beyond our understanding. He is the First Cause of all things and as such utterly free of all constraint from outside Himself. Nothingness cannot exert pressure; but before God created there was nothingness. When we feel baffled by God's infinite freedom we should console ourselves by realizing that, as with all God's attributes, this is boundlessly outside the power of our limited understanding. I have pointed out that when God created He was free not only from outside pressure but free also from any pressure from within the Godhead, even the pressure of His infinite love. To teach, as even holy men have done, that love forced God to create is to limit what is essentially limitless, the divine nature. When God willed that something besides Himself should exist, that was an act of infinite freedom.

## 18. CREATION AND GOD'S LOVE

Every human example when applied to God brings with it some lack of vision. For example, saintly men have argued that perfect love must of necessity communicate itself to others; but the only way God could do that would be by creation, since He could not love what did not exist. He had to create something to love it. The weakness of the argument is that it is regarding infinite love like finite human love. God is not a social animal; men are. They have obligations in charity to their fellow men. Charity, for example, would cause a very learned man to pass on his knowledge to others; but he would not sin if he did not do so. If there were not others to whom he could

communicate his knowledge he would have not the slightest obligation. So with God. He is bound by no social obligations, least of all that of adding existence to nothingness.

Moreover, for the learned man to be charitable is an exercise of perfection; he grows in virtue by it; he gains something. But God can gain nothing at all; no act of His can enrich Him. God's love expresses itself within Himself with the infinite adequacy proper to the Godhead as I have explained in another booklet. (The Blessed Trinity and the Life of the Soul [Catholic Truth Society, No. 'Do 301'].)

In his famous hymn St Francis Xavier prayed:

My God, I love You - though there were

No heaven for me to win,

No hell to punish those who dare

Against You love to sin.

That and the remainder of the verses are perfectly correct, but sometimes a wrong twist is given to this line of spirituality. Like the pagan Stoics some have maintained that to practise virtue in order to get to heaven is an imperfection. The truth is that God wants us to want heaven, because there we shall render Him His greatest glory. There we shall manifest more perfectly than during our life on earth His perfections. Because of His gifts we shall be supernaturally like Him. So, when we lead good lives in order to get to heaven we are acting for God's glory. Once there our very existence will essentially be only for the glory of God. There we shall be in God's perfect world. In the limitless depths of His knowledge this, man's ultimate end, was eternally present to God. So, when with inexpressible freedom He willed creatures to exist, He had that one purpose in view, His own eternal glory. It lies at the foundation of all Catholic theology, morality, spirituality and asceticism. The present creation of God is not absolutely perfect but its purpose is the greater glorification now and for eternity of absolute perfection.

Note: The following matters, which are not strictly within the scope of this booklet, might be noted: It is of faith, defined by the Fifth General Council of the Lateran in 1513 that every human being possesses an individual soul and each is personally immortal. There is not the slightest evidence that souls exist before their connection with bodies or that they are exiled into bodies because of some defect in a former state. Holy Scripture directly refutes the idea that souls fell into sin in a previous existence (Rom. 9:11). Reincarnation is completely against Catholic Faith. Nor are souls emanations of the divine substance nor are they generated in any way by parents. Pope Leo XIII condemned the teaching that the soul of a child emerged from the 'spiritual semen' of its parents. It is now generally accepted that God creates souls and infuses them at the moment of conception.

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