

Supplemental Information for
Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism
The Profession of Faith: What We Believe
To group leaders of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs
September/October, 2009

Session 5: “The Mystery of Creation”

Suggested Environment

Note again that there is a recommendation for the *USCCA* to be a part of each table arrangement. I have received positive feedbacks from many who have invested in the *USCCA* so don't hesitate to continue to encourage your group to add it to their library for continuing adult faith formation. Some seven years ago there was a photo taken by the Hubble Space Telescope that became famous as it made its way around the Web because of its title, “The Eye of God.” [Here's a link to it](#) in case you want to add something beautiful from creation to your Environment table. Here's a smaller view of it, a large image on a computer really does look like an eye in space some 650 light years away.



My point is simply to encourage you to introduce into your space something that resonates with your sense of why creation has this ability to draw us to it and then beyond. For many individuals over time a beautiful sunset has that same power and can conjure up a sense of mystery and transcendence. So pick something that fires your imagination like a gorgeous fall colored tree, etc.

Lifting Our Hearts

Many of you know that I worked for the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis for nearly 30 years so I have to tell you how much I came to appreciate the good St. Francis. His Canticle of Creatures is on the wall in my “work area = basement cave, according to Joanna,” and if you want to use the [entire Canticle, here's a link to it](#). It was not without good reason that Francis was known as a “lover of all creation.” He was known to be able to see the transcendent God in all facets of nature and at times could be found transfixed by a simple drop of dew on the face of a flower. In this world that is going “green,” St. Francis is well known as a saint of the

environment. You might just recall for your group before beginning the prayer how it was suggested we can become aware of our God, from Session 1, through nature.

Sharing Our Good News

I had encouraged last session an effort to become aware of how many references are made to the Trinity during Mass, so I'd like to recommend you raise the question with the group to see if anyone had merely counted the number of signs of the cross we use during liturgy. Our worship reflects the preeminent place the Trinity plays in our lives, and we will read and discover in this session that the Trinity lies at the heart of creation.

Reflection One "It was good..."

The story beginning this session speaks of an "open window" and the sound of birds, nature drawing us into an appreciation of the blessings of creation. Certainly try to get some stories from your group about their own sense of awe in the face of the beauty of this created world. CCC 288 has a wonderful line it describing creation: "...the first and universal witness to God's all-powerful love." When you get to the third paragraph on the bottom of page 34, you might want to remind people that God, after each day of creation, paused to look at his handiwork, and the Bible says, "Indeed, it was good." It is also important to develop an understanding that the story of creation leads us to know that God is not only the beginning of all things but also the intended end of all creation, including us humans at the apex of creation.

If you have individuals who struggle with the idea that the challenge of sin can be seen as alienation from God's love, see if you can get them to appreciate the symbolism of the story of mankind's turning to self and self-interest rather than following God's plan as it develops in Genesis. I would encourage you to have your group underline that very first sentence on the top of page 35, "Creation is about right relationship....of creation." Then have someone read section 289 CCC, and focus on the words "...express in their solemn language the truths of creation..." Each of the pairs of idea that follow could be subjects for intense discussion but I think this section of the Catechism clearly points to how we as Catholics can read the "truths" of scripture without having to be caught up in literal argument of how the world came to be in only seven days. This particular section (289) is a great example of how our Church can speak to us and help us discern those truths necessary for salvation we read about in a previous session on Sacred Scripture and Tradition. If it flows a bit more evenly for your discussion, you might direct your group to the grey box on page 36 and highlight the words near the center, "The sequence of creation reported in Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis is not literal or scientific, but poetic and theological." Theological because our faith leads us to see God as the beginning and the end of all that is, and that is after all, how we used to symbolically portray the Alpha and the Omega in art and church decoration.

Sections CCC 290-292 are really important to read for the sense of how the Trinity is involved in creation itself. You may want to point out either directly or by referring the group to the footnotes within 291, the New Testament's witness in John's Gospel to the role of the

Word in creation and the Church's confession of the Spirit's role. For this is indeed what believing Christians have been professing since the early creedal formations.

In the next paragraph we are reminded of how much JPPII often referred to finding God's hand not only in nature but in the very laws of nature that God has written into creation. It should come as no surprise then that his successor, Pope Benedict, has made several very important statements about the environment and the duties we have to protect and preserve creation as a gift from our creator.

I just love the question posed at the beginning of that third paragraph on page 35: "And now that we are here, in this world which God has made, what next?" To outline the challenge this question poses effectively, you might want to suggest underlining some key words in the last paragraph before Pondering the Word. Those words are: "...God who respects our dignity as humans created with free will." So we are faced with choices, ethical issues, personal choices, and a host of directions that will affect not only us but the world of our children and grand children. And to think we have such free will that we can deny God and even his plan for us and creation. Even though we sometimes feel guilt, as the text might suggest, when we realize we are "a mixture of holy intentions and human weakness," end the discussion, if you can, on a positive note that our God is always there with his limitless love and mercy. That love and mercy are always there even if our "what next" is not strictly according to his plan for us or for creation.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

Genesis 1:1-2:4a "In the beginning..."

- 1 ¹ In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,
- 2 ² the earth was a formless wasteland and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.
- 4 a God saw how good the light was.

¹ [1:1-2:4a] This section introduces the whole Pentateuch. It shows how God brought an orderly universe out of primordial chaos.

² [2] The abyss: the primordial ocean according to the ancient Semitic cosmogony. After God's creative activity, part of this vast body forms the salt-water seas ([Genesis 1:9-10](#)); part of it is the fresh water under the earth ([Psalm 33:7](#); [Ezekiel 31:4](#)), which wells forth on the earth as springs and fountains ([Genesis 7:11](#); [8:2](#); [Proverb 3:20](#)). Part of it, "the upper water" ([Psalm 148:4](#); [Daniel 3:60](#)), is held up by the dome of the sky ([Genesis 1:6-7](#)), from which rain descends on the earth ([Genesis 7:11](#); [2 Kings 7:2, 19](#); [Psalm 104:13](#)). A mighty wind: literally, "a wind of God," or "a spirit of God"; cf [Genesis 8:1](#).

³ [5] In ancient Israel a day was considered to begin at sunset. According to the highly artificial literary structure of [Genesis 1:1-2:4a](#), God's creative activity is divided into six days to teach the sacredness of the Sabbath rest on the seventh day in the Israelite religion ([Genesis 2:2-3](#)).

I have included these footnotes from the Bible available through the USCCB web site since I think it is important see the Church's interpretative role in Sacred Scripture at work, especially in footnote "1" and in footnote "3." Three in particular helps to shape the division of creative activity as a literary device/structure used to highlight the importance and sacredness of the Sabbath for Israel.

It is also a nice thought to think of the "mighty wind" as the Word of God that comes from the "mouth" of God, just as wind, breath, comes from us as we speak. It is not without significance that the Spirit is felt on Pentecost as a "Wind" that came through the upper room and became tongues of fire that transformed the apostles from frightened followers to martyrs and spokesmen for the One who first called them to follow Him.

It is even more brought home when we consider the figurative nature of the story of creation to look at several different translations of these first two verses from the Bible. You may have individuals with different Bible editions and translations so check out which versions you have present. Here are some of the different translations; the above one from the USCCB is the *New American Bible*.

Old Faithful *King James Version*:

¹In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

²And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Translation:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;
The earth was waste and void: darkness covered the abyss, and the spirit of God was stirring above the waters.

New Revised Standard Version:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth;
The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep,
while a mighty wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Jewish Bible from JPS translation

“IN THE beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth.

Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters.”

Note how the Jewish reverence for the name of God precludes them from mentioning his sacred name.

Sharing Questions

Good question that doesn't need much amplification but try to keep the focus on creation. You might even reflect forward to the real meaning of “turkey day,” not just a Thursday of NFL football, but the original sense of the thankfulness for the bounty of our God who provides our food through his hand in the marvels of created nature.

Reflection Two: “In the image and likeness of God”

I think this section is very well written, especially the first three paragraphs but you would benefit from looking with you group at pages 68-70 of the *USCCA*. The chapter headings in that resource are “The Fall” and “Understanding the Impact of Original Sin.” This material in these paragraphs is mainly taken from there and you may find it useful for you to go over it before hand. I mention that because I've often run into individuals who have difficulty with the story of Adam and Eve. The *USCCA* p. 69 makes the following statement: “Scripture uses figurative language in describing the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 but affirms an event that took place at the beginning of human history. The language is figurative, but the reality is not a fantasy.” What this means in another sense is that we may not be fully able to explain what the Church calls Original Sin but we certainly can't deny its impact on our lives, both individual and collective. Somehow we all sense we have a temptation, a tendency to use our freedom for our own self-interests, to abuse others and creation, and even ignore God. While we may struggle to find the right images to describe this, none of us can deny its impact on our lives. I don't think you will find it difficult to have your groups talk about the impact of sin and choices that alienate us from each other and our God—just watch one segment of national and international news. Some theologians have described original sin as the necessary price of freedom, if we do indeed have the ability to freely choose either right or wrong.

I would suggest that you raise the question implied in the grey box on page 37—namely, the potential of seeing a real contradiction between faith and reason. While this is a large subject for discussion, I think the authors of our series have touched on an important issue especially for an educated audience. I remember how one of my former Rotary fellows joked about “It is kind of late, isn't it, to forgive Galileo?” As the Catholic Perspective section indicates, we should find no inherent conflict between the two, properly understood.

The key to this type of discussion is to realize that we are talking about two very different ways of knowing. I can know the value of “x” in an equation by logic and the rules of math or in a similar vein discover some truths about the world I live in by using the scientific method and doing experiments that prove a hypothesis. Faith as a way of knowing can carry for the one with faith the same sort of certitude but it has a lot in common with the mystery of love. The ability to have faith [to choose freely] as a gift from our creator and the ability to love share the same wonderful reflection of the image of the God who made us. And just as we stand in awe at our ability to love someone, an act not based on mathematical equations or even logic, we can say “I love you” with all the confidence and certitude we possess. And so we “know” we love someone; and that love can grow over time as we “practice” love through our gifts of love, our charity, and our love grows and endures even in the face of disappointment [a forgotten anniversary?] and has much in common with faith.

I know I have referred to JP II’s encyclical on Faith and Reason before, but it still is a masterpiece of bringing two approaches to knowing together. Here’s a link to it, if you want to touch on certain sections from this [index page \[Faith and Reason\]](#). I have also attached several paragraphs from that document as an addendum [2] to this section of notes. I also found it interesting to look at a document I had originally copied from a [translation of Pope John Paul’s address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences](#) back in 1992 when he discussed the Galileo case and his belief that faith and reason can never be in conflict. I know this is way beyond what you should bring into your discussion but some of you might find his remarks interesting.

Finally, I would hope that your group would be comfortable with the recent statements by our Pope on the environment. Sometimes social conservatives have used the “green” movement as portraying the advancing face of socialism. Our two recent Popes have reminded us that the natural world is God’s creation as well and has to be respected as such not only in itself but as a legacy to be passed to future generations. The grey box which refers to an objective moral order in creation which is discernable and the basis of a code of environmental ethics is an important concept. To deny that we can read or find a moral order inherent in creation is to deny much of the Church’s natural law basis for ethics, so perhaps you may need to reflect back to the earlier discussion of the role of our shared conscience as human beings pointing to something transcendent, something beyond our world of immediate experience.

Sharing Our Faith

All good questions but I was drawn to the third bullet point with the idea that we are still in the month of October which is Respect Life Month, from conception to death. So I would suggest that maybe the word “children” in the question can be focused on the end spectrums of life. In particular, maybe you might suggest steering the discussion in tandem with the second bullet point in the next section, a suggestion that aims toward the elderly in our experience. Both discussions that point toward those two spectrums I think would complement the sense of October as a month in which we call attention to our commitment to life from natural conception to natural death.

Living the Good News

See above section but also suggest checking parish bulletin for activities that are available to tie into the week's opportunities for action.

Lifting our Hearts

Just a note to let you know that this closing prayer is prayed regularly by the entire Church when we pray the Liturgy of the Hours since this psalm is said by the universal Church every fourth Monday evening at evening prayer. What a fitting praise to our God as creator!

Again, you will find me encouraging each group to open up the closing to spontaneous prayer for all the variety of intentions that we always do carry in our hearts so suggest going around the room/group to ask each person present to pray for a specific intention. Be a good example and start using our CTK format: EG; For an increased appreciation of our God's great gift of creation and for respect for all creation but especially that of life, let us pray to the Lord. Group response: Lord, hear our prayer.

Addendum Note1: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to allaabs@comcast.net

Addendum Note 2: Excerpt from Pope John Paul's Encyclical on *Faith and Reason...*

“For the inspired writer, as we see, the desire for knowledge is characteristic of all people. Intelligence enables everyone; believer and non-believer, to reach “the deep waters” of knowledge (cf. *Prov* 20:5). It is true that ancient Israel did not come to knowledge of the world and its phenomena by way of abstraction, as did the Greek philosopher or the Egyptian sage. Still less did the good Israelite understand knowledge in the way of the modern world which tends more to distinguish different kinds of knowing. Nonetheless, the biblical world has made its own distinctive contribution to the theory of knowledge.

What is distinctive in the biblical text is the conviction that there is a **profound and indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith**. The world and all that happens within it, including history and the fate of peoples, are realities to be observed, analyzed and assessed with all the resources of reason, but without faith ever being foreign to the process. **Faith intervenes not to abolish reason's autonomy nor to reduce its scope for action, but solely to bring the human being to understand that in these events it is the God of Israel who acts**. Thus the world and the events of history cannot be understood in depth without professing faith in the God who is at work in them. Faith sharpens the inner eye, opening the mind to discover in the flux of events the workings of Providence. Here the words of the Book of Proverbs are pertinent: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps” (16:9). This is to say that with the light of reason human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith. Therefore, reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God in an appropriate way.

17. There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action. Again the Book of Proverbs points in this direction when it exclaims: “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (*Prov* 25:2). In their respective worlds, God and the human being are set within a unique relationship. In God there lies the origin of all things, in him is found the fullness of the mystery, and in this his glory consists; to men and women there falls the task of exploring truth with their reason, and in this their nobility consists. The Psalmist adds one final piece to this mosaic when he says in prayer: “How deep to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I try to count them, they are more than the sand. If I come to the end, I am still with you” (139:17-18). The desire for knowledge is so great and it works in such a way that the human heart, despite its experience of insurmountable limitation, yearns for the infinite riches which lie beyond, knowing that there is to be found the satisfying answer to every question as yet unanswered.”