

## 2. 'Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen'

The book of Genesis begins with the solemn words, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. These words are taken up in the Nicene Creed when we describe God as maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.' Creation is the foundation of 'all God's saving plans', the 'beginning of the history of salvation' that culminates in the coming of Christ.

What we believe about creation takes us to the heart of what we believe about human and Christian life. How does the Christian faith respond to the basic questions that people of all times have asked themselves – 'Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is our origin? What is our end? Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going? The beginning... the end – the two questions that are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions. The question about the origins of the world and of man have been the object of scientific study for generations, studies which have, says the Catechism, 'splendidly enriched our knowledge of the age and dimensions of the cosmos, the development of life forms and the appearance of man', discoveries which (for the believer) rather than being a cause for doubt invite us to 'an even greater admiration of the greatness of the Creator.'

For the believer it is, says the Catechism, 'not just a question of knowing when and how the universe arose physically or when man appeared, but rather of discovering the meaning of such an origin-is the universe governed by chance, blind fate, anonymous necessity or by a transcendent, intelligent and good being called God.'

Many and various have been the beliefs and ideas about the origins of the world down through the ages. Too many to go in to detail here, but suffice it to say that a fair number reject any idea of the world having some transcendent origin. As people of faith, we put the world's origin down to God, a God whom we believe in, not from blind faith, but because we know him with certainty through his works and by the light of our human reason. Our faith enlightens our reason and so helps us come to and understand what Christians believe to be the truth. 'By Faith' says the letter to the Hebrews, 'we understand that the world was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.' In his book *I believe* the pope emeritus, Benedict takes up the theme of Christian belief and unbelief about our origins, quoting St. John's Gospel, 'In the beginning was the word' – the *logos*. 'The world', he says, 'is a product of creative reason,' dismissing creation as some random chance. Benedict says 'It was not the case that in the expanding universe, at a late stage in some tiny corner of the cosmos, there evolved randomly, some species of living being capable of reasoning...' (p20). If man were merely a random product of evolution... then his life would make no sense. Reason is there at the beginning.' He reminds us that because there is reason there is freedom too and because freedom can be abused, there is also evil... 'like a thick black line, drawn across the universe.'

Beyond our natural knowledge, it was to the people of Israel that God gradually revealed the mystery of creation – summarised in Genesis, where we are told not only the truths of creation (its origin and its end, its order and goodness), but also we see played out the drama of sin and the hope of salvation as the story unfolds. Giving his own reflections on what we believe about 'the maker of heaven and earth', Benedict also reminds us that this is 'not information about the external processes by which the cosmos and man himself came into being'. In formulating the creed, the Fathers of the Church were not looking at the story of creation 'as an account of the process of the origins of things, but rather as a pointer towards the essential, towards the true beginning and end of our being.' 'If', he says, 'creation was not included in our profession of faith, it would be to misunderstand the very history of God with men... for the sweep of history established by God reaches back.... to creation. And for the faithful, it would mean 'the whole history of salvation', had become 'too limited and too small.'

Why bother? Why did God go to so much trouble? Well, we believe that the world was created for the glory of God -- not as if it were some piece of machinery or some plaything, neither 'to increase his glory but to show it forth and to communicate it' wrote St Bonaventure, 'for God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness'. This is a theme taken up by the 1st Vatican Council, when the work of creation is spoken of, 'as an act of God's own goodness, not for increasing his own beatitude, or his perfection, but

in order to manifest his perfection through the benefits he bestows on his creatures.’ The ultimate purpose of creation, says the Catechism, is that God ‘who is the creator of all things’ may become all in all ‘assuring his own glory and our beatitude.’ There is no necessity about it, not blind fate or chance but from God’s own wisdom. He wanted to make his creatures share in his being and goodness. He needed no help, he created freely, but ‘out of nothing!’ And just as he made the light shine in the darkness, so says the Catechism, ‘he can also give the light of faith to those who do not yet know him.’

Reflecting on God’s love and goodness in creation, Benedict in *I believe* says God has made it clear ‘his creation is very dear to him’, and that it is equally clear that ‘he loves man.’ A God who ‘loves with a personal love’, an elective love too, for of all the nations, ‘he chooses Israel and loves her’, not to the exclusion of all others, but rather with a view to ‘healing the whole human race.’

As the source of all things, we believe it is God who not only gives us life, but directs our lives too. We believe life is more than just a set of feelings and sentiments. As creator, God embraces man ‘in his entirety, from his origins to his eternal destiny’ (Benedict). There is an order to creation, nothing haphazard about it, God ‘willed creation as a gift to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him,’ says the catechism. Created by his ‘eternal word’, and with ‘all things arranged by measure and number’ says the Book of Wisdom. Infinitely greater than all his works, ‘his glory set above the heavens’, (*Psalms 8*) and yet present in all his creatures, and more particularly in man, who is created ‘in the image of God’, the pinnacle of creation, and God saw, not only that it was good, like the rest of creation, but that ‘it was very good.’

The God in whom we ‘live and move and have our being,’ for having created us, we believe too, that he does not like a clockmaker with a clock, leave us to get on with it, rather we believe that at every moment he upholds and sustains all his creatures- creation is a work in progress, God is guiding the whole creation, with his wisdom and love towards our ultimate end, perfection- we call this divine providence.

Creation is, says the Catechism ‘the foundation of all God’s saving plans... the beginning of the history of salvation that culminates in the coming of Christ. And whilst we profess in the Apostles Creed that he is maker of heaven and earth, the Nicene Creed makes it explicit that this profession includes the ‘seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible.’ Heaven and earth means all that exists, creation in its entirety, it also indicates the close bond between the two, whilst distinguishing one from the other.

We affirm the earth as the world of men, whilst heaven, the heavens, is God’s own place and the place of the Saints and those spiritual creatures, the Angels who surround him. It was the 4th Lateran Council that stated that ‘God from the beginning of time made, at once, out of nothing, both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal, that is angelic and earthly and then the human creature, who shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body.’

Our Christian belief asserts that nothing exists that does not owe its existence to God. The world began when God’s word drew it out of nothingness, all existent beings, all of nature and all human history are rooted in this primordial event – *Genesis*. Prof. Macquarrie (former Regius Professor) is very keen on the concept of creation out of nothing, ‘ex nihilo’ – which he says stresses the ‘utter difference between an act of creation and the act of making one thing from another – and so each creature, any particular being stands between nothing and being! Macquarrie takes an existential approach, quoting St. Augustine of Hippo – who was not the first theologian to ask if there was a time when there was nothing?

‘What’ asks St. Augustine, ‘was God doing before creation?’ ‘Let them see there could be no time without a created being.’ If then there was not such a time we also have to remember there was no ready made world either, we can see there is a sense of progression – in the bible man subdues the earth and he names the creatures, activities in which, says Macquarrie, man helps to shape the world and advance it to fuller being.’ There is cooperation as well, it could have been a failure, it might not have got as far as it did! Interesting thought! In relation to time and science, when and so on Macquarrie says we may indeed learn that there was a time when the cosmic process began. However, he says, theology can have nothing to say on this matter. No more than any scientific answer would effect our understanding of the doctrine of Creation. That seems very sound thinking – it could have been written by Newman himself!

The Catechism tells us that everything reflects 'a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness' it also teaches that God wills too the interdependence of all creatures: sun and moon; the smallest flower and the sparrow in the hedgerow; the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities telling us that no creature is self sufficient-they exist to complete each other and to be in the service of each other. There is though a hierarchy of creatures for the bible tells us that mankind is the summit of the Creator's work and God has made us stewards of his creation! As we look around us, it is indeed very good as we see the diversity and interdependence of all that God has created, in all its beauty and wonder – a beauty that reflects the infinite beauty of the creator Himself! And on the seventh day the bible also tells us, that when God had finished his work, he rested, making this a holy day. Though of course creation was far from over which is where divine providence comes in. Our faith tells us that Creation was always fashioned with a view to the Sabbath rest, bringing us back to God and a life of worship and adoration of Him, there is too in our belief about creation a continual looking forward, a hope and a longing for the new creation, what the Catechism calls the eighth day. The Christian Church believes a new day dawned on the day of Christ's resurrection. The seventh day completed the first creation, the 8th day begins the new creation – the work of creation culminating in the greater work of redemption, that new creation in Christ Jesus, in which the first creation finds its meaning and summit – Jesus Christ born before all ages and yet who for us men came down from heaven.

When we think about God as creator, maker of heaven and earth there will always be, as we noted last week, a fine line to be drawn between his transcendence or distance from it and his immanence or presence: too distant then he looks as though he isn't involved, too immanent then we begin to drift into pantheism where we believe all things are but part of God, and each soul is a divine spark! If we keep our minds focused on Jesus however, then we see just how closely God is involved in the Creation and how Creation is related to the life of the Blessed Trinity. The God who is 'maker of heaven and earth' and yet it is through Jesus Christ 'that all things are made.'

*Next time... "Jesus"*