"Look at heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed."
- 2 Macc. 7:28

"And whence and in what manner was this, unless from You, from whom are all things, in so far as they are? …You, therefore, O Lord, who art not one thing in one place, and otherwise in another, but the Self-same, and the Self-same, and the Self-same, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, did in the beginning, which is of You, in Your Wisdom, which was born of Your Substance, create something, and that out of nothing…therefore, out of nothing You created heaven and earth: a great thing and a small, because You are Almighty and Good, to make all things good, even the great heaven and the small earth. You were, and there was nought else from which Thou created heaven and earth…" - St. Augustine, Confessions, Book VII

1. Creation – A Product of God's Abounding Love

All cultures throughout history have asked themselves questions about the origin of all things: Where did the world come from? How was it created? Where is it going and how will it end? Where did man come from and why is he different from the other animals? This longing to know is part of man's nature, as Aristotle says, "All men by nature desire to know" (Metaphysics, I).

The existence of creation testifies to the existence and power of God. "The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament declares His handiwork" the Scriptures tell us (Ps. 19:1). Why did God create the universe?

It is important to acknowledge that God was in no way constrained to create: He has existed from all eternity as infinite blissful communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is wrong to imagine that God needed to create the universe because He was lonely or to increase His glory or otherwise suffered some lack. He would have been just as blissful, loving and glorious had He chosen never to create at all.

The Church teaches that God chose to create out of His infinite goodness, in order to show forth and communicate His glory to the creatures He would form. The universe was created because and for love, the love of the Trinity, Who is Everlasting Love. As Vatican I stated:

"This one, true God, of His own goodness and "almighty power," not for increasing his own beatitude, nor for attaining his perfection, but in order to manifest this perfection through the benefits which he bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel "and from the beginning of time, made out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal…" - Vatican I, Dei Filius, 1

The source of creation is God's overflowing goodness, motivated by Divine Love that by its nature is diffusive.[1] The Divine Goodness resounds to the eternal praise and glory of God.

[1] Thus, the classic saying, *bonum diffusivum sui est* ("The good spreads itself").

2. Creation ex nihilo

It is of the Catholic faith that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, which means that He created all things "out of nothing" with no prior material to work with. In the strict theological sense, only God is able to create anything; man can manipulate and rearrange matter, but only God can cause it to come into being. Despite all our technology, nobody has yet to be able to bring one particle of matter into existence; this power belongs to God alone.

"If God had drawn the world from pre-existent matter, what would be so extraordinary in that? A human artisan makes from a given material whatever he wants, while God shows his power by starting from nothing to make all he wants."

- St. Theophilus of Antioch, Ad Autolycum II (c.175 A.D.)

Creation ex nihilo is taught plainly in the Scriptures in 2 Maccabees 7:28 and is implied in the Creation story of Genesis 1.

3. A Trinitarian Work

The creation of the universe out of nothing is a mystery veiled to the human mind; but the Scriptures and Catholic Tradition tell us that it is a work of the Holy Trinity. Though God the Father is often associated with Creation, it is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who create.

- Genesis 1 tells us that it is through the agency of God's "Word" that creation was called forth and uses the formula "and God said" to denote creation. Christian (and even Jewish) tradition holds God's Word to be active and dynamic. Christians know that the Word is Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, through Whom God created. As Psalm 148:5 says, "Praise the name of the Lord. For he spoke, and they were made: he commanded, and they were created."
- From the beginning, Genesis tells of the Spirit of God's involvement in creation. It is He who hovers over the waters (or in some translations, "broods") waiting to give form to the world God has called forth. The Old Testament often presents the Spirit as the One who gives life to all things: "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth." (Job 33:4, Psalm 104:30)
- The New Testament tells us that Christ was present at the Creation and indeed was the agent through whom God created: "He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." "For in him [Christ] all things were created, visible or invisible…" (John 1:2-3, Col. 1:16

4. God sustains Creation

Furthermore, God not only created the universe at a single point in the past but continually sustains it at every moment. This is against the notion, made popular by the Deists in the 18th century, that God created and founded the universe, but He then let it go according to its own laws and no longer has any involvement in it. According to Deism, God is bound by the natural

laws that He set in place and consequently is unable to intervene in the affairs of the world (i.e., through miracles).

On the contrary, Scripture and Tradition affirm that God is intimately involved in the affairs of the world and, furthermore, that He continually holds the world in existence at every second. As Job stated, "If He should take back His spirit to Himself, and gather to Himself His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (Job 34:14-15).

5. Creation is Good

Because God is supremely good, everything He creates is good, as an effect always bears a resemblance to its cause, and God, who is Goodness, is not able to bring forth anything evil. Thus, all things created by God are good, insofar as they exist and are made by Him. As St. Thomas Aquinas says, "Every being that is not God is God's creature. Now every creature of God is good and God is the greatest good. Therefore, every being is good" (STh I, 5, iii). This is against the Gnostics and Hindus who claim that matter itself is evil, a prison or distraction from the pure realm of the Spirit, and something we must escape from. Christianity affirms the goodness of the material world.[2]

6. Man-Made in God's Image

"Of all visible creatures only man is "able to know and love his creator". He is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake", and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity."

- CCC 356

Man alone among the creatures is endowed with a body and a spirit and alone among the animals can exercise reason. It is because of this intellectual faculty that man is said to be made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), for by exercising his intellect in search of truth and will in pursuit of the good he resembles His Creator, who is Truth itself. Man, though created on the sixth day along with the beasts, is (unlike them) destined for eternal life with God.

Man is a composite being; he is made up of a material body and an immortal, immaterial soul. This is contrary to modern secular science, which sees man as just a biological being, and is also contrary to the systems of Descartes and Plato, who saw man as a spirit trapped in a body, a "ghost in a machine." On the contrary, the Catholic faith teaches that the essential man is a composite of body and soul, flesh and spirit.

Notes: The soul is the substantial form (life-giving principle) of the body. Though spirit is distinct from the material, it must be emphasized that humanity has a single nature, therefore, the body and soul are not two competing natures trapped together, rather, their union forms a single, complete human nature. It is the soul that grants intellect (the ability to reason, judge, and know

[2] *This refers only to the goodness it possesses insofar as it is created by God and exists; this is called "ontological" goodness and does not take into account the possibility of moral evil, which will be touched on later.*

truth) and will (the ability to choose and love). The soul is created by God at the moment of conception. While the body perishes, the soul is immortal and will eventually be reunited with the body at the Final Resurrection on the Last Day.

7. Angels

The Catholic faith, following the Scriptures and ancient Judaism, asserts the existence of other intelligences besides humans who are non-corporeal (do not possess a body). These beings are called angels. The word "angel" is Greek for messenger (*angelos*).

St. Augustine says, "'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': from what they are, 'spirit', from what they do, 'angel.'"[3]

"With their whole beings the angels are servants and messengers of God. Because they "always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" they are the "mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word." As purely spiritual creatures angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness."

-CCC 330

Angels, even the lowest, are much more powerful than humans. Nevertheless, they are not infinite, nor omnipotent or omnipresent. They are created along with the rest of creation and, though they are incorporeal, can be said to occupy whatever place they are active in at any given time.

The Catholic Church recognizes **nine "choirs" of angels** divided into **three overarching hierarchies**. This classification is primarily based on the writings of the 5th-century theologian Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Summa Theologiae* by St. Thomas Aquinas. They are ordered from those closest to God down to those who interact most directly with humanity:

1) **The First Hierarchy (The Counselors) -** These angels exist in the direct presence of God, focusing entirely on His glory, love, and eternal purpose.

    - **Seraphim:** The highest choir. Described as "burning ones," their sole purpose is to surround God's throne, continuously burning with divine love and praise.
    - **Cherubim:** Associated with supreme wisdom and knowledge. They act as the guardians of God's glory and the keepers of celestial records.
    - **Thrones:** These angels represent God's justice and authority. They serve as the literal "seat" of divine judgment and mediate the purposes of God to the lower hierarchies.

2) **The Second Hierarchy (The Governors) -** These angels are responsible for maintaining the order of the cosmos, governing the laws of nature, and directing the operations of the universe.

[3] *St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 103,1,15:*

- **Dominations (Dominions):** The "governors." They regulate the duties of all lower angels and oversee the administration of the universe.
- **Virtues:** Known as the spirits of motion. They govern the physical laws of nature, the stars, and the elements, and are responsible for performing miracles.
- **Powers:** Spiritual warriors who maintain the balance of the universe and defend against the forces of darkness and spiritual evil.

3) **The Third Hierarchy (The Messengers) -** These are the angels who interact most directly with the material world, human societies, and individual people.

   - **Principalities:** The overseers. They are assigned to watch over large groups, nations, kingdoms, and dioceses, guiding worldly leaders and societies.
   - **Archangels:** High-ranking messengers who deliver pivotal announcements to humanity. While tradition speaks of many, the Catholic Church formally recognizes only three by name in Scripture: **Michael**, **Gabriel**, and **Raphael**.
   - **Angels:** The lowest choir and the closest to humanity. This group includes our **Guardian Angels**, who are assigned by God to guide, protect, and intercede for individual human beings.

   Note: With the exception of Lucifer, who was a Seraphim, and a few otheres, the fallen angels came from this lower sphere.

It is also of Catholic Tradition that every person has a guardian angel, "a protector and shepherd leading him to life" (CCC 336).

8. Devils ("Demons")

The Church also affirms the existence of angels who are "fallen" and have turned their will towards evil. These are called "demons" (from the Greek word daemon meaning "spirit") or sometimes "devils" (from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning "accuser"). Demons are angels who, at some point after their creation by God, rejected God's lordship and thus "fell" from heaven. The leader of these fallen angels goes by many names: Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, Belial.[4] Tradition simply calls him "The Devil" or "The Evil One." No one knows how many devils there are, but Tradition and Scripture seem to suggest that around 1/3 of the angels followed Lucifer in his revolt against God (see Rev. 12:4)

Though official dogmatic pronouncements on the demons are scarce, a few things are certain about them:

- They, like the angels, are individual, personal intelligences (not impersonal forces or "bad karma")

[4] *Satan = Heb. "Satan", 'adversary'; Lucifer = Lat. "Lucifer", 'light-bearer', 'morning star'; Beelzebub = Heb. "ba'al-z'bub" 'lord of the flies'; Belial = Heb. "Bel'yya'al", the 'worthless one', or 'destruction.'*

- The devils were originally created good and became evil through a free choice of their own. Scripture attributes this sin to pride (see: Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:11-19).
- Their sin is irrevocable. It is through the final, definitive and irrevocable nature of their decision and not through any defect of God's mercy that their sin is unforgivable.
- It is through the instigation of the Devil that our first parents chose to disobey God and fall into original sin.
- The demons continue to this day to attempt to lead man away from God and into sin in thought, word and deed. However, they are not omnipotent and cannot read our thoughts. The power of God and the good angels is much greater. Despite the devil's temptation, man is still responsible for his own moral actions.
- Their final downfall and condemnation is assured by Scripture and it is only a matter of time until their ultimate defeat. "And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone…' (Rev. 20:10)
- Though one ought not to dwell inordinately on the presence and activity of the demons, one ought certainly not disregard them either.

9. The Fall of Man

Man, created in the image and likeness of God, possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just a something but a *someone*. Man was not only created good, but was created in a state of friendship and communion with God his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him. This is called the original "state of holiness and justice," which was "to share in divine life" (CCC 375).

Adam and Eve existed in a state of original innocence and were destined to live forever with God. What happens next is referred to in Christian Tradition as the "Fall" of man; i.e., his fall from grace. Through the agency of the devil, sin and death make their entry into human history. Man was put to the test by God and, because he heeded the voice of the serpent, failed his trial. Some quotes from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* best exemplify this point:

397 Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command. This is what man's first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.

399 Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image - that of a God jealous of his prerogatives.

400 The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination. Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and hostile to man. Because of man, creation is now subject "to its bondage to decay". Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true: man will "return to the ground", for out of it he was taken. Death makes its entrance into human history.

Results of Adam's Fall

402 All men are implicated in Adam's sin, as St. Paul affirms: "By one man's disobedience many (that is, all men) were made sinners": "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." The Apostle contrasts the universality of sin and death with the universality of salvation in Christ. "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."

403 Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination towards evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "death of the soul". Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.

404 How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man". By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act.

10. Original Sin & Concupiscence

Although it is part of each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called "concupiscence." Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

Besides original sin, the fall of Adam leaves us with what Tradition has termed "concupiscence." Concupiscence arises because of original sin, and disposes us to commit actual sin, but itself is not sin. Concupiscence is marked by three characteristics that plague mankind:

1) *A darkened intellect*
2) *A weakened will*
3) *Disordered passions*

These three factors are a result of losing the original grace of God given to man at his creation. Without this grace, our intellects are unable to clearly perceive the truth of God, our wills are

weakened in standing up to temptation, and our passions are disordered, often ruling us when we ought to rule them. Concupiscence is a fact that we all must live with. Baptism, though remitting all sin (original & actual) and the consequences due to sin, does not remove concupiscence, which will remain as long as we are in this mortal life.

11. Evolution and the Literal Meaning of Genesis

In the modern world, Christians are often left wondering how to properly interpret the Creation account of Genesis 1. Some Christians have wholeheartedly adopted the account offered by evolutionary theory and have relegated Genesis 1-3 to the realm of mythology; others have adopted a strict literal view of the account and believe in a literal 6 day creation and believe the earth to be only around 6,000 years old. What is the Catholic Church's teaching on this matter?

The Catholic Church has no official teaching on how Genesis must be interpreted, and the ancient Fathers have widely divergent opinions on the matter. The encyclical *Humani Generis* ("On Human Origins") of Pope Pius XII issued in 1950 teaches that while it may be acceptable to believe the evolution of the human body may have taken place, certain traditional Christian doctrines must be preserved. According to the Church, what we must believe about Creation is:

- Evolution can be said to have occurred with the material from which the human body comes, but it can by no means be taught as certain and must be put forth as only a theory (36).
- The human souls of Adam and Eve, and of all subsequent humans, are immediately created by God; the soul did not evolve (36).
- All human beings take their origin from an original pair or two human beings (Adam & Eve) and that Adam and Eve were real, historic individuals (37).
- Genesis 1-11, though containing metaphoric images, are nonetheless to be taken as historical accounts of true events (38). The language is metaphorical, and perhaps mythic, but preserves the account of a truly historic event.

Therefore, strict materialist evolution is ruled out entirely. Evolution is permitted within a limited framework, so long as certain truths of the faith (the special creation of man by God, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the reality of the Fall and Original Sin) are preserved. That being said, in recent years there have been many criticisms of evolutionary theory, many of them very significant. At most, a Catholic can acknowledge the evolution of the human body from preexisting matter as a possibility, but that is the extent of it (for more on some criticisms of evolution, see Darwin's Black Box by Michael Behe).

12. Why did God not prevent the first man from sinning?

To this perplexing question, St. Leo the Great responds, "Christ's inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away." and St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "There is nothing to prevent human nature's being raised up to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good. Thus St. Paul says, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more'; and the Exsultet sings, 'O happy fault…which gained for us so great a Redeemer!'"

13. Conclusion

After the Fall, man finds himself subject to sickness and death, ruled by his passions and drawn to sin despite his best intentions. Nevertheless, God, who knows all, did not abandon man but promised him a redeemer and announces the coming of a Messiah, born of a woman, who will triumph over the serpent.

"For a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested. Caught in this conflict, man is obliged to wrestle constantly if he is to cling to what is good, nor can he achieve his own integrity without great efforts and the help of God's grace." - Gaudium et Spes 37 § 2 (1965)

For Further Reading:

Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book I
St. Augustine, Confessions, Books XI, XII, XIII
Genesis 1-3; Psalm 19; Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:11-19; 2 Maccabees 7
Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, Dei Filius, 1 (1870)
St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 5-6
Michael Behe, Darwin's Black Box
Humani Generis, 1950
Catechism of the Catholic Church § 279-425
Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes § 37 (1965)
Jean Danielou, The Angels and Their Mission