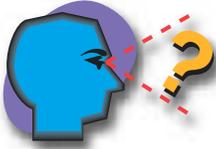


Genesis

Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

Revelation About God

1. *"And God said, 'Let there be ____'; and there was ____." (or "and it was so.")*

We see first the power of God's Word to call things into existence. We see that God is not only powerful but that He uses His power to create life. He is the source of life.

"And God saw that it was good...and it was very good."

Pleasure and goodness are packed into Creation, intensifying until God pronounces it "very good" at the end. In this we see God's own goodness and His intention to create the universe to be a source of satisfaction for Him. We also see that He is the source of goodness.

"And there was evening and there was morning, the first (2nd, 3rd, etc) day."

God created the world in measured steps. That the elements of creation are arranged in order of increasing complexity on successive "days" suggests that God planned and designed the universe, and created it deliberately and in an ordered fashion. He is like an artist who patiently works, observes, then continues working until everything is perfect.

"God called" (the light day, or the dark night, etc.)

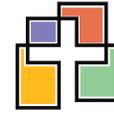
In ancient times, if you named something you were demonstrating dominion or ownership of that thing. The fact that God named the things He created demonstrates His dominion over creation.

2. The use of the plural "us" and "our" in Genesis 1:26 suggests two things about God. First, like the "royal we" it reflects His greatness, His power and majesty. The plural noun Elohim suggests this as well: there it is a plural of emphasis, not of number. But there is also a longstanding Christian tradition of seeing "us" and "our" as reflecting the Trinity: God the Creator is NOT alone. It gives us an intimation of communion, or community within the godhead, that will be developed further in the New Testament (see next question).

3. The New Testament reveals that Jesus was the "word" that God spoke "in the beginning." He was present as the Creative Word of God. In other words, His role was to create and to sustain the universe and life. "Through him all things were made" (John 1:3); "by him all things were created...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17) From the very first words of Scripture, we are introduced to the Word of God Who will, throughout all the rest of its pages, slowly but magnificently be revealed. He will be fully manifested when He takes on human flesh in the womb of Mary, becoming the Incarnate Son of God.

4. Genesis 1:2 tells us that "the Spirit (lit. ruah, or "breath") of God was moving over the face of the waters." God's loving power, symbolized by his breath, was hovering expectantly over the unformed chaos of creation. This completes the description of creation of the natural order as an act of the Blessed Trinity.

5. Responses may vary. Catholic piety and liturgical life are deeply rooted in "remembering," an action that is as close to "timelessness" as humans can get. This is simply a continuation of how Israel lived its relationship with



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

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God. For example, from the time of the Passover, when God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, He commanded them to continually "remember" His great works on their behalf. This was not just a pious recollection of something. It involved offering up a sacrifice of a lamb every year at the same time the deliverance had occurred, although in this sacrifice, the blood of the lamb was not painted on the doors again. A festal meal of the sacrificed lamb would follow, in which each element would make present again for the partakers the circumstances of that wonderful night of deliverance. This memorial erased the boundaries of time. It was as if, for all Israelites, time had stood still. Catholic life enables us to experience this very same thing-timelessness-every time we go to Mass. We understand that during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Jesus, made once for all on Calvary and made continually before the throne of God in heaven, is made sacramentally present to us. We are, at that point, not bound by time or space. In this moment of intense communion with God, it is entirely appropriate that we, mortals though we are, encounter Him in a way that is outside of time and space, since we can see from Genesis that He dwells outside of them.

Likewise, in our liturgical calendar and in many of our pious works (praying the rosary, doing the Stations of the Cross, etc.), we are continually re-visiting episodes in the life of Jesus, blinking past all the years that separate us in time from them. As Catholics, we are blessed to have many experiences of the Eternal Now.

Revelation About the Universe

6. God created two realms of existence: the heavens and the earth. He created spirit and matter out of nothing, and then formed the matter as He wanted. The Hebrew for create, *berah*, means literally "to create out of nothing." It is only ever applied to God. The Bible later confirms this in 2 Mac. 7:28: "I beseech you, my child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see everything that is in them, and to recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed."

7. On the first three days, God dealt with the "formlessness" of the earth, separating and ordering the elements into (1) day and night; (2) sky and sea; and (3) earth and vegetation. In effect he created time, space, and life. All the elements necessary for life are present: light, air, water, and food. At this point He has created a habitation, or a home, which still is "void," or empty. The second three days are related to the first: each day, God fills one of the parts of the universe He formed on the first three: (4) the sun, moon, and stars are placed in the heavens; (5) fish and fowl fill the sea and sky; and (6) living creatures and man are made to fill the earth. By this symmetry and the increasing order of dignity of the inhabitants, the narrator shows that all is perfectly arranged according to God's plan; at each step the Creator declares it "good."

8. In vs. 16, God makes "the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." Note that the sun and moon are not named. In the ancient world, the very words "sun" and "moon" were synonymous with the names of deities. In contrast, Genesis teaches that the sun and moon are not powers to be feared but created things with a God-given purpose in the universe. They are put in dominion over day and night - but have no jurisdiction over man or the earth. Psalm 19 tells us of another function: to tell the glory of God. When we gaze at them, we should recognize the power and beauty of God in them. The text says these lights (sun, moon, stars) are for "signs" and to mark out time and seasons. What might they be signs of? Think of the star that the magi followed to find the newborn King. Think also of the eclipse of the sun on Good Friday. They are elements used by God to communicate with His creation. Think also about the description of Mary that we see in Rev. 12:1: "Now a great sign appeared in the heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet,



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

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and on her head a garland of twelve stars." Is it any wonder that the Church understands Mary to be the Queen of Heaven, since she wears as garments in this heavenly vision elements of dominion that we first meet in Genesis? In vs. 26, Man is given dominion over the rest of creation: "over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." See the response to question 12 below for more on dominion.

9. All that God made pleased and satisfied Him. Everything was filled with goodness, since it all came from God Himself. To be blessed by God, in this context, is to be pleasing in His sight. This is an important idea to grasp in this moment in Genesis. As Catholic students of Scripture, we will want to keep a very close eye on what becomes of this blessing that God has given to man. In some ways, the blessing of God-how we got it, how we lost it, and how we'll get it back-is the central focus of all salvation history. The entire Bible can be summed up in terms of God's blessing. In the Old Testament, the blessing of God (being pleasing in His sight) is given, lost, promised, prophesied, and pre-figured. In the New Testament, it is regained, preached, preserved, and prevails. Because of its importance in the rest of Scripture, linger here in Genesis 1 and soak in just how magnificent it was for man and beast to be blessed by God at the dawn of creation.

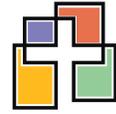
Revelation About Man

10. Responses will vary. As God thinks, plans, executes, and evaluates, man in His image should be expected to do the same. God's boundless creativity is a central aspect of His nature. Surely man will likewise be creative. All God creates is good and well-ordered; even so we would expect man to have an appreciation of goodness and order and to take pleasure in creating. The care God exhibits for creation leads us to expect compassion and care in man. The eternal nature of God indicates a capacity for eternal life in man. And the fact that God, although one, is not alone but exists in communion with the Word and the Spirit prepares us for the coming pronouncement in chapter 2 that "it is not good that the man should be alone."

11. God, who is Spirit and thus neither male nor female, is nonetheless reflected in mankind only by male and female together. Man and woman are created "equal as persons...and complementary as masculine and feminine" (CCC 372). Each has the inherent dignity of being created in God's image. In communion together, and particularly in the context of the family, they fully reflect the image of the Divine Family, which is God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

12. God's blessing of both man and animals includes a charge to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. In addition, man is charged with subduing the earth and having dominion over it. Dominion means "supreme authority; sovereignty." God, who is absolute king over all His creation, shares His authority with man by entrusting him with the earth and its resources, thus giving man the dignity of cooperating with Him in completing the work of creation. Man's dominion is not intended to be domination; he is rather to care for the earth, to oversee it, to work it and enjoy its fruits.

13. In asking man to reproduce and fill the earth, God is asking man to help complete that which He began to do in the beginning. In giving man the responsibility to be fruitful, He allows him to participate in the creation of human life. In giving him charge over the earth, God is vesting man with some of His own authority, in effect asking man to share in His work of ruling. Man's two-part vocation is thus a reflection of God Himself. It enables him to be what he was created to be: a creature made in God's image. And it is in fulfilling this vocation that he gives praise and glory to God.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

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14. God gives them food to nourish and sustain them (vss. 29-30). God is the source not just of man's habitation, his abilities and responsibilities. He is the source of all man needs for his life to be sustained. It is of no small importance for Catholics to recognize this simple provision from God. In connecting Himself to the sources of food for man and beast, God shows Himself to be the true nourishment of all life. Is it any wonder, therefore, that worship of God in the Old Testament often included a festal meal, and in the Church, has as its central act, the provision of a heavenly meal for man, the Body and Blood of Christ?

15. Responses will vary. It is difficult to answer this from Genesis 1 alone. But given God's self-sufficiency and limitless perfection, and having observed the great care with which God fashioned the earth for us, it is reasonable to assume we are here because He knew we would enjoy living and knowing Him. He created us for His good pleasure and our own. Theologian F.J. Sheed has this to say: "It is a new light upon the love of God that our gain could be a motive for his action. He knew that beings were possible who could enjoy existence, and he gave them existence. By existing they glorify him-but who is the gainer by that? Not God, who needs nothing from any creature. Only the creature, whose greatest glory is that he can glorify God." [Theology for Beginners (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1981), 49]. For a New Testament perspective on God's purpose for us, read Eph. 1:4-6.