WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC FAITH ACTUALLY BELIEVE ABOUT CREATION?

God the eternal divine creator of the universe, formed all things from nothing and holds all things in existence, created all of humanity out of love and for love, so that we may have a relationship with Him and give Him glory.

Sources: Genesis 1-2, Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraphs 279-314

1. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what the modern Christian should believe about Creation. Often, the two polarities proclaim either:
   a. We have to deny “deceitful” science because it contradicts the Bible
   b. The story of creation is just based on senseless mythos that has been disproven by the Bible.
2. The reality of the situation is that the Catholic Faith takes a stance firmly in the middle, where faith and science goes hand in hand.
   a. The Church teaches on faith and morals, not science.
   b. Science, when done well, helps us to understand the created world, and God as our creator as a result.
   c. Properly understanding the story of Creation requires that we first understand how to interpret the Bible effectively.
   d. The Bible is not one book, but rather 73 separate books that all come together as the divinely inspired Word of God and tell the story of God’s unending love for us.
   e. Each individual book of the Bible has to be considered within the context of its genre, human authorship, and **intent.**
   f. The first few chapters of Genesis, (generally chapters 1-11) were passed down through oral tradition long before being committed to writing. As a result, they are told in a poetic style.
   g. Therefore, the story of creation should not be read as a science textbook, because that was not the **intent.** The story of creation should be read as an allegory for the care and plan God had for all of creation, especially mankind.

GOD AS CREATOR, CONTINUED

1. How does that affect our understanding of Genesis chapters 1 and 2?
    a. What we do **not** need to believe about creation:
        i. We do not need to believe that creation all happened in 7 days
        ii. We do not need to assume that Creation played out precisely as it is laid out in the two stories of creation
    b. What we should believe about Creation:
        i. God himself is not created, and has always existed. He is the uncreated creator.
        ii. God created all things from nothing, and gave all things intelligent design. Nothing exists by accident, and everything is given purpose.
        iii. All creation is, by God's own standards, "good.".
2. Most importantly, the Story of creation communicates important aspects of how we as humans are created.
    a. Humanity is the crown of creation, we are created with specific purpose and we are set apart from the rest of creation.
    b. We are made body and soul (God breathes His life into us), and we are made **very good.**
    c. Man and Woman are created as equals, both with specific purpose.
    d. We are given **dominion** over the created world, not to rule over it, but to care for it as a gift from God.
3. Perhaps most importantly, we are **made in the image and likeness of God.**
    a. Being made in God's image likeness does not mean we look like God, but rather we share in the traits of God.
        i. We are given an intellect, the ability to reason and think unlike any other creature.
        ii. We are given free-will, the ability to choose right from wrong.
        iii. We are given an imagination, the ability to think beyond the perceived world.
    b. Most importantly of all, we are made by love and for love.
        i. God, who is love, and is Himself a relationship of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, creates us out of love.
        ii. God does not need us. He wants us. God could have continued on for eternity with out creation, but chose to create us out of love.
        iii. As a result, we are created for love, to not only love other humans, but to enter into a loving relationship with God.
        iv. That is our purpose: to be loved by God, and to love God in return.

FAITH AND SCIENCE, SOME CONSIDERATIONS

After the in-person presentation, I wished I had more time to provide some clarity on what I meant regarding the cohesive relationship of faith and science, especially in the context of our considerations of creation. So, here is a brief look at some guiding principles on what I would consider to be some of the most common challenges:

Misconception #1: The Big Bang Theory has disproven the idea of a divine creator. Quite the opposite, in fact! One of the most overlooked aspects of the Big Bang Theory is that it was originally theorized by a faithful priest who was also a theoretical physicist, named Father Georges Lemaître. The key difference between his original theory and secular interpretations is that Lemaitre recognized the need for a "Big Banger" an intelligent being putting the act of the Big Bang into action. The laws of physics tell us that matter cannot be created or destroyed, and an object at rest will remain at rest, unless acted upon by another force. A simple overview of the Big Bang theory describes the rapid expansion of the entire universe from an infinitely hot and dense state that began to expand rapidly and produce everything we observe today over billions of years. The problem with excluding God from this equation is experts still don't have an explanation for where this infinitely hot and dense origin came from or how it was set into motion. We as Christian do. Father Lemaitre proposed that God created that original singularity and set this into motion. In fact, the theory states that the universe began in an explosion of light and energy, mirroring the first day of Creation in which God spoke light into existence on the first day.

Misconception #2: The theory of Evolution undermines the idea of a divine creator. When Charles Darwin originally proposed the idea of evolution, he certainly did not have a divine creator in mind. However, modern Christians are welcome to accept the theory of Evolution so long as we understand that it still requires the careful and intentional hand of God assisting in the process, which in my opinion, makes the theory of evolution that much more believable. The creatures of the earth have taken on characteristics that have made wonderous things possible, and it is much more conceivable that it all happened not by random happenstance, but by an intelligent creator sculpting His creation over many millennia. Additionally, we as Christians must note that if mankind evolved from other creatures, there must be a specific moment in history in which mankind came to be and was set apart from other creatures by God, having our own origin, given an eternal human soul, and made in God's image. Some have theorized that the creation story's description of man being "formed from the clay of the earth" could point to the idea that mankind was created from things that already existed. However, that is only a theory and there is no definitive teaching from the church on whether or not that is an appropriate way to interpret the story or not.

FAITH AND SCIENCE, SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Lastly, we should briefly consider misconceptions about creation that result from a very rigid interpretation of scripture. These types of misconceptions often have their origins in the belief in "Sola Scripture" or "Scripture alone" in which the Bible is the only source of understanding of faith, lacking the teaching authority entrusted to the Church by Christ that we as Catholics call the Magisterium. This approach to scripture often results in either every single detail of God's Word needing to be understood literally and therefore there is no room for interpretation, OR every person can interpret scripture according to their own understanding and drawing the conclusion that makes the most sense to them. Both of these approaches have unique pitfalls.

Misconception #3: The Earth is only 6000 years old

This misconception results from the genealogy of Adam and Eve to Abraham in Scripture. This genealogy, if read literally, only accounts for a very small number of generations to pass between Adam and Abraham. However, as mentioned in the Crash Course notes, the Story of Creation was passed down orally for many generations, and is a poetic allegory for the origins of humanity and God's care for mankind. With our modern study of fossils, carbon-dating, and ongoing scientific discoveries, we have come to know that the 7 day structure of the creation story is very likely a metaphor that helped early people with little scientific knowledge understand the most essential truths of our existence as God's creation, and was not intended to be a literal depiction of the timeline in which things occurred. Not only does the story of creation fall within this genre, but the approximately the first 11 chapters of genesis. As a result, we have to look deeper at what God has intended to communicate to the reader through the human author for us to understand about our origins, and the . This understanding of biblical theology also allows us to understand how things like dinosaurs that are not mentioned in the creation story could exist without contradicting the biblical story.

This same principle can be applied to our understanding of other early stories in Genesis, including Noah's Ark and whether or not the WHOLE world was flooded and ALL the animals of earth were on the Ark. **I hope this brief overview has helped provide clarity and has also emphasized two things:**

1. Science is a gift from God that, when done well, allows us to use our intellect to better understand the created world, and understand God as our loving creator more fully.
2. We must interpret Scripture as a CHURCH, all together, with the help of all the people who have come before us, modern experts, and most importantly through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is entrusted to preserve the revelation of God throughout all time.