

Genesis



Lesson 1: *Let There Be Light*

Suggested Responses

Suggested responses are provided for the purposes of guiding group discussion safely within the bounds of Church teaching. Small group discussion leaders should become familiar with the suggested responses prior to group discussion. In order to make the most of this study, all participants are encouraged to respond to the questions on their own before reading the suggested responses.

1. On Sundays, in the Creed, we pray to, “God the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. We find God the Father in Gen 1:1 where we read, “God created the heavens and the earth.” The Son, who is described in the Creed as “Light from Light, eternally begotten of the Father,” can be discerned in Gen 1:3, “and God said let there be light.” We also profess that through the Son “all things were made,” and throughout the creation account we see that God creates in the same way as he does in Gen 1:1-3, by His Word. Jesus, of course, is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit whom we profess is found in Gen. 1:2, “and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”
2. The early Christian community in the latter part of the first century was made up of a large number of Jewish believers. Most certainly St. John and the Divine Author of Scripture used the phrase “in the beginning” to purposefully draw the reader’s attention to the opening words of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament). The Gentile converts to Christ were familiar with those words as well. By drawing attention to the Creation account, St. John is helping his readers understand that the eternal Son of God is not among the created order. He is not a creature like man; rather, he is a part of the Godhead and always has been, from all eternity; thereby, St. John pointedly defends the divinity of Jesus. John also tells us that all life and light existed in him from before creation, so that when his readers considered the opening lines of Genesis and how light dispelled the darkness, they would see that it was the eternal Son of God, Christ the Light of the world, at work. In calling Jesus “the Word,” John signifies once again how all creation came into being through him. Throughout Genesis, God “speaks” creation into existence out of nothingness, and John is telling his readers that “the Word” is the Christ who is and who was before all creation. In Revelation, St. John quotes the Risen Lord as saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega... I am the beginning... I am the end,” i.e., *I am eternal*.



3. According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, with the latter subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church. The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation. All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal. Relying on the spiritual sense we see that, thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs. The first spiritual sense is the allegorical sense: Through it, we can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism. The second spiritual sense is the moral sense: As a consequence of this sense, the events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction." The third spiritual sense is the anagogical sense (in Greek *anagoge*, or *leading*): By means of it, we can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland; thus the church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

4. God created the angels "from the beginning" (CCC 327), that is, at the time of all Creation -- all that is seen and unseen. Angels are purely spiritual beings, with will and intelligence. They are servants and messengers of the Lord. The fact that the sacred author of Genesis does not specifically mention the creation of the angels indicates that the text is not meant to be an exhaustive narrative; rather, it is intended to convey certain important truths of Creation as indicated in our response to the previous question.

5. The cultures surrounding the people of Israel commonly worshipped various gods: idols that were likenesses of various beasts; gods of the sun, moon, and stars; gods in the form of human persons, both real and mythological. The creation account establishes the sovereignty of the one true God, for it is he who created the beasts, the celestial objects, and human beings. The Creation account also puts the things of this world into proper perspective; they are here at the service of man who has been given dominion over them. For people today, the temptation to worship someone or something other than God comes in a number of forms. Some have fallen into a form of "earth worship" in which the extremes of environmentalism have created a god called "Mother Earth" or "Mother Nature." Others have fallen into an idolatry of self in which they glorify themselves above all others, even God. Some even fall into an idolatry of the rich, famous, and powerful, putting far more stock in *their* words and actions than the revelation of God. Many individuals put their romantic interest in another human being above their love for God. We should all, therefore, be careful not to dismiss the command against idolatry as being one that doesn't really apply to us; the temptations may have changed shape and form, but they are always there.

6. The active creative power of God is evident simply in the very fact of existence. Article 301 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states that God upholds, sustains, preserves, and spares all things at every moment. This means that God's creative power was not simply an event of the past; rather, it makes each moment a reality. This important truth stands in direct opposition to the heresy of Deism, which essentially asserted that God created the world only to leave it to its own devices like a jeweler who made a watch, wound it up, and walked away.



7. God did not pronounce Man “good” as he did all other created things. Is this a sign that Man is not good? Hardly! Man’s goodness is self evident in his likeness to God. Pronouncing Man good was not necessary. In granting dominion to Man over all other things, we come to understand that the created things that preceded Man were made for Man (CCC 353). Because Man is in the image and likeness of God, yet is also among the created order, he unites in his very nature the spiritual and the material; by his dominion over all the earth he unites Creator and created (CCC 355). Man is the only creature that is mentioned as being created male and female, even though we know that the animal world is also created as such.

8. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) wrote “the mystery of man cannot be grasped apart from the mystery of God.” He stated that man was not created as an isolated being; that by being created in God’s image Man makes visible the invisible; that the purpose of an image is to reflect its model; and so the physical nature of Man is integral to making the communion of persons, the Trinitarian nature of God, visible in the physical world. God did not pronounce man “good” as he did all other created things. This is not a sign that man is not good, but rather that man’s goodness is self evident in his likeness to God. Pronouncing man good was not necessary.

9. Man’s dominion over all the earth is only exercised properly when he shows forth a respect for the integrity of Creation as a whole. This means *all* Creation, including man. In our day there are those who have inordinately glorified the mineral, vegetable, and animal world, losing sight of the wisdom provided in CCC 2415. This perspective, presented by the Teaching Authority of the Church, rests on the recognition of man’s unique dignity among Creation, which allows him to exercise dominion in a way that benefits and serves the family of mankind. In order to truly understand this teaching, we must see the Creator’s image in man. And by loving God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, we will be less likely to fall into the trap of loving nature as an end unto itself, rather than as that which it was created for -- to be in the service of Man and for his benefit.