



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 6 February 2013*

[\[Video\]](#)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

The *Creed* which begins by describing God as “the Father Almighty”, the topic of our meditation last week, then adds that he is “Maker of heaven and earth”, and thus takes up the affirmation with which the Bible begins. Indeed the first verse of Sacred Scripture reads: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). God is the origin of all things and his omnipotence as a loving Father unfolds in the beauty of the creation.

In creation, God manifested himself as Father, since he is the origin of life, and in creating he shows his omnipotence. And Sacred Scripture uses very evocative images of it. (cf. Is 40:12; 45:18; 48:13; Ps 104:2-5; 135:7; Prov 8:27-29; Job 38-39). As a good and powerful Father he takes care of what he has created with unflinching love and faithfulness, as the Psalms say over and over again (cf. Ps 57:11; 108:5; 36:6). So it is that creation becomes a place in which to know and recognize the Lord’s omnipotence and goodness, as well as an appeal to our faith as believers that we proclaim God as Creator.

“By faith”, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote, “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” (11:3). Faith thus implies the ability to recognize the invisible, by identifying its traces in the visible world. Believers can read the great book of nature and understand its language (cf Ps 19:2-5); but the word of revelation that awakens faith is necessary if man is to become fully aware of the reality

of God as Creator and Father. The Book of Sacred Scripture says that human intelligence can find the clue to understanding the world in the light of faith.

With the solemn presentation of the divine work of creation that unfolded over seven days, the first chapter of Genesis in particular occupies a special place. God brought the creation to completion in six days and on the seventh, the sabbath, he did not do anything, but rested: a day of freedom for all, a day of communion with God. Thus, with this image the Book of Genesis tells us that God's first thought was to find a love that would correspond to his love.

Then his second thought was to create a material world in which to place this love, these creatures who respond to him in freedom. This structure therefore results in the text being marked by certain meaningful repetitions. For example, the sentence "God saw that it was good", is repeated six times (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and to conclude, the seventh time, after the creation of man: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (v. 31). Everything that God creates is beautiful and good, steeped in wisdom and love; God's creative action brings order, instills harmony and bestows beauty.

In the narrative of Genesis, therefore, it becomes clear that the Lord created with his word: ten times we read in the text the phrase: "God said" (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). It is the Word, the *Logos* of God who is at the origin of the reality of the world, and saying: "God said", it was so, emphasizes the effective power of the divine Word. This is what the Psalmist sings: "by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth... for he spoke, and it came to be, he commanded and it stood forth" (33[32]:6, 9). Life springs forth, the world exists, because all things obey the divine Word.

However our question today is: in the age of science and technology does speaking of creation still make sense? How should we understand the narratives in Genesis? The Bible does not intend to be a natural science manual; rather, it wishes to make the authentic and profound truth of things understood. The fundamental truth that the accounts of Genesis reveal to us is that the world is not a collection of forces that clash with each other; it has its origin and its permanence in the *Logos*, in God's eternal Reason which continues to sustain the universe.

A plan of the world exists which is conceived by this Reason, by the Creator Spirit. To believe that this is the foundation of all things illuminates every aspect of existence and gives us the courage to face the adventure of life with trust and hope. Therefore, Scripture tells us that the origin of being, of the world, our own origin is not in the irrational or in need, but rather in reason and love and freedom. Consequently, there is this alternative: either the priority of the irrational, of necessity, or the priority of reason, of freedom, of love. We believe in the latter hypothesis.

However, I would also like to say a word about the summit of all creation: man and woman, the human being, the only being "able to know and love his creator" (Pastoral Constitution on the

Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 12). Looking up at the heavens the Psalmist wondered: “when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:3-4).

The human being, lovingly created by God, is indeed tiny in comparison with the immensity of the universe. At times, as we look with fascination at the enormous expanses of the firmament, we too perceive our limitations. Human beings are inhabited by this paradox: our smallness and our transcendence exist side by side with the greatness of what God’s eternal love wanted for us.

The accounts of the Creation in the Book of Genesis also usher us in to this mysterious environment, helping us to become acquainted with God’s plan for man. They affirm, first of all, that God formed man of dust from the ground (cf. Gen 2:7). This means that we are not God, we did not make ourselves, we are earth; yet it also means that we come from the good earth through the work of the good Creator.

In addition there is another fundamental reality: *all* human beings are dust, over and above the distinctions made by culture and by history, over and above every social difference; we are one humanity modelled with God’s one earth.

Then there is a second element: the human being came into existence because God breathed the breath of life into the body he had formed from earth (cf. Gen 2:7). The human being is made in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27). For this reason we all bear within us the life-giving breath of God and every human life — the Bible tells us — is under God’s special protection. This is the most profound reason for the inviolability of human dignity against every attempt to evaluate the person according to utilitarian and power-based criteria. To be in the image and likeness of God indicates that man is not closed in himself but has in God an essential reference point.

In the first Chapters of the Book of Genesis we find two important images: the garden, with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the serpent (cf. 2:15-17; 3:1-5). The garden tells us that the reality in which God has placed the human being is not a wild forest but a place that protects, nurtures and sustains; and human beings must not consider the world as a property to be looted and exploited but as a gift of the Creator, a sign of his saving will, a gift to be cultivated and safeguarded, to increase and to develop with respect and in harmony, following its rhythms and logic in accordance with God’s plan (cf. Gen 2:8-15).

Then the serpent is a symbol that comes from the Oriental fertility cults that fascinated Israel and were a constant temptation to abandon the mysterious covenant with God. In this light Sacred Scripture presents the temptation of Adam and Eve as the core of temptation and sin. What, in fact, did the serpent say? He did not deny God but insinuated a subtle question: “Did God say, ‘you shall not eat of any tree of the garden’?” (Gen 3:1). This is how the serpent awoke in them the

suspicion that the covenant with God was nothing but a chain that bound them, that deprived them of freedom and of the most beautiful and precious things of life. Their temptation became the temptation to build by themselves the world in which to live, to refuse to accept the limitations of being creatures, the limitations of good and evil, of morality; they saw their dependence on the love of God the Creator as a burden of which to free themselves. This is always the essence of temptation. But when the relationship with God is falsified, with a lie, putting ourselves in his place, all other relationships are altered. The other then becomes a rival, a threat. Straight after succumbing to the temptation, Adam turned on Eve (cf. Gen 3:12); the two conceal themselves from the sight of that God with whom they had been conversing as friends (cf. 3:8-10); the world is no longer the garden in which to live in harmony, but a place to exploit, riddled with hidden snares (cf 3:14-19); envy and hatred for others entered man's heart. An example of this is Cain who kills his own brother Abel (cf. 4:3-9).

Actually, in opposing their Creator people go against themselves, deny their origin and consequently their truth; and evil, with its painful chain of sorrow and death, enters the world. Moreover, all that God had created was good, indeed, very good, but after man had opted freely for falsehood rather than truth, evil entered the world.

I would like to highlight a final teaching in the accounts of the Creation; sin begets sin and all the sins of history are interconnected. This aspect impels us to speak of what is called "original sin". What is the meaning of this reality that is not easy to understand? I would just like to suggest a few points. First of all we must consider that no human being is closed in on himself, no one can live solely for himself and by himself; we receive life from the other and not only at the moment of our birth but every day. Being human is a relationship: I am myself only in the "you" and through the "you", in the relationship of love with the "you" of God and the "you" of others. Well, sin is the distortion or destruction of the relationship with God, this is its essence: it ruins the relationship with God, the fundamental relationship, by putting ourselves in God's place.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that with the first sin man "chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good" (n. 398). Once the fundamental relationship is spoilt, the other relational poles are also jeopardized or destroyed: sin ruins relationships, thus it ruins everything, because we are relational. Now, if the relationship structure is disordered from the outset, every human being comes into a world marked by this relational distortion, comes into a world disturbed by sin, by which he or she is marked personally; the initial sin tarnishes and wounds human nature (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 404-406). And by himself, on his own, man is unable to extricate himself from this situation, on his own he cannot redeem himself; only the Creator himself can right relationships. Only if he from whom we distanced ourselves comes to us and lovingly holds out his hand can proper relationships be restored. This happens through Jesus Christ, who goes in exactly the opposite direction to Adam, as is described by the hymn in the second chapter of St Paul's Letter to the Philippians (2:5-11): whereas Adam did not acknowledge his creatural being

and wanted to put himself in God's place, Jesus, the Son of God, was in a perfect filial relationship with the Father, he emptied himself and became the servant, he took the path of love, humbling himself even to death on a cross, to set right our relations with God. The Cross of Christ thus became the new tree of life.

Dear brothers and sisters, living out faith means recognizing God's greatness and accepting our smallness, our condition as creatures, letting the Lord fill us with his love and thus develop our true greatness. Evil, with its load of sorrows and sufferings, is a mystery illuminated by the light of faith which gives us the certainty that we can be freed from it: the certainty that it is good to be a human being.

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### **To special groups:**

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland and the United States. May your visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul inspire you never to place anything before the love of Christ. Upon all of you, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, an affectionate thought for the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May today's Memorial of the St Paul Miki and his Companion Martyrs of Japan encourage you, dear *young people*, and in particular you students of the Franciscan "Faà di Bruno" Institute in Turin, on the 150th anniversary of its foundation, and those of the Regnum Christi School in Rome, to spend your energy for the cause of the Gospel; may it help you, dear *sick people*, to accept your cross in spiritual union with the Heart of Christ; and may it encourage you, dear *newlyweds*, always to have trust in Providence, also in the difficult moments of your conjugal life.

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