

Module 1 Introduction to Care for Our Common Home

Lesson 1

Understanding Worldview (Lens) and our Relationship with Creation

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What is humanity's relationship to the rest of Creation?

What lens (worldview) is expressed in Genesis stories of creation and an Iroquois story of creation?

How is the lens of dominion, stewardship, or kinship evident in contemporary advertisements?

TEACHER PREPARATION

Read

Laudato Si', 65-70, 75 (see appendix): Pope Francis speaks of the theology of creation and discusses the meaning of the stories in Genesis

Watch

Dan Horan's video, Models of Creation (18 minutes) for teacher formation

Download and Set Up

The accompanying PowerPoint presentation containing classroom texts and advertisements

Print

Coalesce and Create Handout, one per student

Print

Appendix Four Corners, one single-sided copy of each four corners

Print

One copy of Stories of Creation-NRSV for the teacher

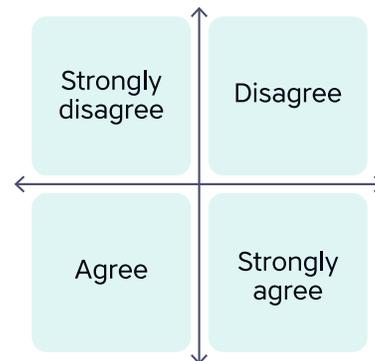
LESSON PLAN

IGNITE

Four Corners:

Place signs in the corners of the room.

- Present students with this statement:
Agree or Disagree: Human beings are the most important creatures on Earth.
- Ask students to move to the corner that best describes what they think and feel.
- Invite students in each corner to share their thinking with one another:
Why did you choose this corner?
- Invite one person per group to share with the large group.
- If there is an uninhabited corner, invite students to imagine why might think this way, and why.



IMMERSE

LENS:

GUIDING QUESTION

What is humanity's relationship to the rest of Creation?

Imagine you wear glasses, and you need them to see. It is the lens in the glasses that gives you your ability to see. We also refer to "lens" as "worldview". Our perceptions, beliefs, understandings, and experiences shape the lens through which we see the world. Three lenses we will discuss are (invite students to record definitions on the handout included in this lesson plan):

Project slide 1 – Dominion: Humans are most important in creation and so have the right to use the rest of creation to serve their purpose.

Project slide 2 – Stewardship: Humans are responsible to protect and care for the rest of creation.

Project Slide 3 – Kinship: Humans are intimately related and connected to the rest of creation in a harmonious relationship that is to be honored and respected. There is not a hierarchy of importance in creation.

Let's examine a few texts/stories to determine which lens is used.

Project Slide 4: First we will look at *two creation stories in the Book of Genesis*. They occur one after the other but are different. Both stories illustrate a particular lens or worldview about the created world and humanity's relationship with the rest of creation.

Project the Power-point presentation of Gen 1:1-2:4a (slides 5-12): As you move through the power point, read only the highlighted parts of each of the 7 days (from the Stories of Creation Appendix).

After going through this story, advance to *Slide 13* which asks which *lens best* suits the story (domination, stewardship, or kinship). Ask students to offer their insight, with reference to parts of the text to support their view. Complete students answers with *following prompts* as needed:

- Essentially this is a love story of God and his creation. Everything is created in love to be a harmonious whole, each part in relationship to all other parts.
- All of the created world is “good”.
- God gives humankind dominion in creation (this is often interpreted as giving humankind power and privilege over the rest of creation but more correctly interpreted as meaning that humankind is asked to see with God’s eyes and act in God’s ways).
- *Note:* It can be argued that this creation story has elements of each lens.

Follow the *same process* with the second set of slides (*Slide 14-15*) which explain the second story of creation (Gen 2:4b-25) Again, read the italicized parts of scripture in the Notes section. Complete student answers to the question of lens with the following prompts, as needed:

- The focus here is on intimate connection with the earth; humankind was born from the earth. The earth continues to give life to humankind.
- Humankind is given the responsibility to till the land (nurture the life-giving properties of creation).
- This story has elements of stewardship and kinship in it.

Thirdly, invite students to listen to the *story from the Iroquois culture* (see attached Creation Stories). *Invite a student to name and connect the characters in the story on the whiteboard* as you read the story (because of its complexity).

Move to the following *slide 18* which asks: What is the relationship between humanity and the rest of the created world in this story? Note:

- humanity’s reliance on the rest of creation for survival and
- the rest of creation’s humility, creativity, and self-sacrifice to support humanity (this is creation’s choice not humanity’s choice)

OPTIONAL

Fourthly, look at St. Francis: Cantic of Creation *Slide 19*. Read aloud only key phrases such as “Brother Sun, Sister Moon...” Move to *Slide 20* and again solicit student insight about which lens is evident.

OPTIONAL

Consider lens in the next three images and quotes on Slides 21, 22, 23. Share your thinking.

COALESCE

Can you spot the lens (worldview) in the advertisement?

In this stage of the lesson, students will apply their understanding of lenses/worldviews to more modern-day examples of advertisements.

- [Korean Air \(0:30\)](#)
- [Great Bear Rainforest Essential Oils \(2:16\)](#)
- [Rolex \(0:54\)](#)
- [Nature Valley \(1:00\)](#)
- [Levis \(2:28\)](#)



Use the links in the next slide of the Power point (slide 24) to show students five advertisements one by one.

- Project the advertisements one by one.
- Using the handout provided, ask pairs of students to classify each video, one at a time, according to the three worldviews (lens) of humanity's relationship to the rest of creation. Ask students to provide evidence and reasoning to explain their choices. (Note: it could be argued that some advertisements fit more than one lens).
- Invite students to share their thinking. Pose questions to increase the precision and depth of their collective thinking and connect worldviews to implications for creation.



CREATE

In the final stage of the lesson, students will represent their understanding of lenses.

- Ask students to represent their understanding of each worldview (lens) using a color, symbol, and image.
- Invite students to share and display these in the classroom.



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COALESCE

Can you spot the worldview in the advertisement?

Instructions: As you watch the commercials, decide which model of creation each one best illustrates. In the space provided, record details and logic to support your choice.

Levi Nature Valley	Korean Air Rolex	Great Bear Rainforest Essential Oils
<i>Dominion</i>	<i>Stewardship</i>	<i>Kinship</i>

CREATE

Color, Symbol, Image

Instructions: For each of the 3 models, represent your understanding of each using a color, and either a symbol or image. Explain your choice in the space provided.

DOMINION LENS

<i>Color</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Image</i>

STEWARDSHIP LENS

<i>Color</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Image</i>

KINSHIP LENS

<i>Color</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Image</i>

Worldview

GENESIS 1-2 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV)

Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

1 In the beginning when God created^[a] the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^[b] swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. 8 God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth

across the dome of the sky.” 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind^[c] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[d] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27 So God created humankind^[e] in his image, in the image of God he created them;^[f] male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

ANOTHER ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION

In the day that the LORD^[g] God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— 7 then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,^[h] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 19 So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man^[i] there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman,^[j] for out of Man^[k] this one was taken.”

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

AN IROQUOIS CREATION STORY

The first people lived beyond the sky because there was no earth beneath. The chief's daughter became ill, and no cure could be found. A wise old man told them to dig up *a tree* and lay the girl beside the hole. People began to dig, but as they did the tree fell right through the hole, dragging the girl with it.

Below lay an endless sheet of water where two swans floated. As the swans looked up, they saw the sky break and a strange tree fall down into the water. Then they saw the girl fall after it. They swam to her *and supported her*, because she was too beautiful to allow her to drown. Then they swam to the Great Turtle, master of all the animals, who at once called a council.

When all the animals had arrived, the Great Turtle told them that the appearance of a woman from the sky was a sign of good fortune. Since the tree had earth on its roots, he asked them to find where it had sunk and bring up some of the earth to put on his back, to make an island for the woman to live on.

The swans led the animals to the place where the tree had fallen. First Otter, then Muskkrat, and then Beaver dived. As each one came up from the great depths, he rolled over exhausted *and died*. Many other animals tried, but they experienced the same fate.

At last the old lady Toad volunteered. She was under so long that the others thought she had been lost. But at last she came to the surface and before dying managed to spit out a mouthful of dirt on the back of the Great Turtle.

It was *magical earth* and had the *power of growth*. As soon as it was as big as an island, the woman was set down on it. The two white swans circled it, while it continued to grow, until, at last, it became the world island as it is today, supported in the great waters on the back of the Turtle.

Compiled by Cynthia Stokes Brown

<https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/big-history-project/what-is-big-history/origin-stories/a/origin-story-iroquois>

Worldview

EXCERPTED FROM LAUDATO SI': ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME, POPE FRANCIS, 2015

II. THE WISDOM OF THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

65. Without repeating the entire theology of creation, we can ask what the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book of Genesis, God's plan includes creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen 1:31). The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons".[37] Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being "confers upon him or her an infinite dignity".[38] Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles! The Creator can say to each one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason "each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary".[39]

66. The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings

and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence.[40] This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.

67. We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (Ps 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23).

68. This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for "he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away" (Ps 148:5b-6). The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other liv-

ing beings. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young” (Dt 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so “that your ox and your donkey may have rest” (Ex 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

69. Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”, [41] and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31). By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Prov 3:19). In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, “we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful”. [42] The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things”. [43]

70. In the story of Cain and Abel, we see how envy led Cain to commit the ultimate injustice against his brother, which in turn ruptured the relationship between Cain and God, and between Cain and the earth from which he was banished. This is seen clearly in the dramatic exchange between God and Cain. God asks: “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain answers that he does not know, and God persists: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground” (Gen 4:9-11). Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered. We see this in the story of Noah, where God threatens to do away with humanity because of its constant failure to fulfil the requirements of justice and peace: “I have determined to make an end of

all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them” (Gen 6:13). These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.

71. Although “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Gen 6:5) and the Lord “was sorry that he had made man on the earth” (Gen 6:6), nonetheless, through Noah, who remained innocent and just, God decided to open a path of salvation. In this way he gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope! The biblical tradition clearly shows that this renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator. We see this, for example, in the law of the Sabbath. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a Sabbath, (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Ex 16:23; 20:10). Similarly, every seven years, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, a complete rest for the land (cf. Lev 25:1-4), when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one’s household (cf. Lev 25:4-6). Finally, after seven weeks of years, which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and “liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants” (cf. Lev 25:10). This law came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in their relationships with others and with the land on which they lived and worked. At the same time, it was an acknowledgment that the gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone. Those who tilled and kept the land were obliged to share its fruits, especially with the poor, with widows, orphans and foreigners in their midst: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after the harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner” (Lev 19:9-10).

72. The Psalms frequently exhort us to praise God the Creator, “who spread out the earth on the waters, for his steadfast love endures for ever” (Ps 136:6). They also invite other creatures to join us in this praise: “Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created” (Ps 148:3-5). We do not only exist by God’s mighty power; we also live with him and beside him. This is why we adore him.

73. The writings of the prophets invite us to find renewed strength in times of trial by contemplating the all-powerful God who created the universe. Yet God's infinite power does not lead us to flee his fatherly tenderness, because in him affection and strength are joined. Indeed, all sound spirituality entails both welcoming divine love and adoration, confident in the Lord because of his infinite power. In the Bible, the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected: "Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you... You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders" (Jer 32:17, 21). "The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless" (Is 40:28b-29).

74. The experience of the Babylonian captivity provoked a spiritual crisis which led to deeper faith in God. Now his creative omnipotence was given pride of place in order to exhort the people to regain their hope in the midst of their wretched predicament. Centuries later, in another age of trial and persecution, when the Roman Empire was seeking to impose absolute dominion, the faithful would once again find consolation and hope in a growing trust in the all-powerful God: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways!" (Rev 15:3). The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible.

75. A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality.

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

76. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature", for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the

Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.

77. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (Ps 33:6). This tells us that the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos or chance, and this exalts it all the more. The creating word expresses a free choice. The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (Wis 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection. Saint Basil the Great described the Creator as "goodness without measure", [44] while Dante Alighieri spoke of "the love which moves the sun and the stars". [45] Consequently, we can ascend from created things "to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy". [46]

78. At the same time, Judaeo-Christian thought demythologized nature. While continuing to admire its grandeur and immensity, it no longer saw nature as divine. In doing so, it emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature. This rediscovery of nature can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings who, as part of the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.

79. In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God's transcendence, within which it develops. Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time "she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction". [47]

80. Yet God, who wishes to work with us and who counts on our cooperation, can also bring good out of the evil we have done. “The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable”. [48] Creating a world in need of development, God in some way sought to limit himself in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator. [49] God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature, and this gives rise to the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs. [50] His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, “continues the work of creation”. [51] The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge: “Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if a shipbuilder were able to give timbers the wherewithal to move themselves to take the form of a ship”. [52]

81. Human beings, even if we postulate a process of evolution, also possess a uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by the evolution of other open systems. Each of us has his or her own personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology. The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a “Thou” who addresses himself to another “thou”. The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.

82. Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. As he said of the powers of his own age: “You know that the

rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:25–26).

83. The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. [53] Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

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