

# From the Heart

A series of essays on basic Catholic doctrines and beliefs

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## Were Adam & Eve real people?

The stories about Adam and Eve, found in the first chapters of the Bible, can be very puzzling. Were they real people, or just symbolic characters? If Adam and Eve were the first humans on earth, and the Bible says they had three sons, how could they have produced the next generation with no other females present?

To understand the Catholic Church's teaching about Adam and Eve, first we must address the broader issue of creation. There are three basic views about the creation of the world:

1. Special, instantaneous creation. This view takes a literal interpretation of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. God created the world and everything in it in six 24-hour days, no more than 10,000 years ago, and created Adam out of the dust of the earth instantly. This view is held by many Fundamentalist denominations.

2. Theistic evolution. This view accepts the idea that living species of plants and animals evolved from lower life forms over the course of many millions or billions of years. However, the entire process was guided by God.

3. Atheistic evolution. This view holds that life on earth began as a random accident, and species evolved by purely natural, unguided, unplanned processes. God was not involved at all.

Modern science has made some remarkable discoveries in recent centuries. Some of these discoveries appear to contradict the literal interpretation of Genesis. The Catholic Church recognizes the importance of science and welcomes continued scientific advancements, as shown in section 283 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states, "The question about the origins of the world and of man has been the object of many scientific studies which have splendidly enriched our knowledge of...the development of life-forms and the appearance of man. These discoveries invite us to even greater admiration for the greatness of the Creator."

The Catholic Church teaches that the universe was specially created by God out of nothing. This view is supported by the scientific Big Bang Theory. The Church, however, does not have an official position on exactly when this took place, nor whether life forms were created instantly or developed over the course of time. If species did develop slowly over time, the Church teaches that it occurred under the impetus and guidance of God.

Additionally, if the human body did evolve, the Church teaches the human soul was specially created by

God and infused into the first man, Adam, at a specific moment in time. In the encyclical *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII acknowledged scientific discoveries but also noted, "The Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God."

Although the Church permits belief in either special creation or theistic evolution, in no circumstances does the Church permit belief in atheistic evolution.

Regarding the question of the next generation after Adam and Eve and the apparent lack of females, we turn to Michelle Arnold, a Catholic apologist at Catholic Answers, an organization devoted to defending and explaining the Catholic faith. (Visit catholic.com for many excellent resources.) Ms. Arnold writes: "Cain's wife's parents were also Adam and Eve. Scripture records the names of three of Adam and Eve's children (Cain, Abel, and Seth), but they likely had more children whose names were unrecorded...Until the human race had grown to a population large enough to make such arrangements unnecessary, God allowed brothers and sisters to marry and have families together."

The story of the creation of the world and the fall of mankind are true stories, even if they were not written using modern literary techniques. The *Catechism* states, "The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man" (CCC 390).

Although there may be figurative aspects to the Genesis stories, the following statements are clearly and forcefully taught by the Catholic Church:

- God is undoubtedly the Designer and Creator of the universe, including all life on earth, regardless of which method(s) He employed.
- Adam and Eve were real people, not symbolic; all other human beings are their direct descendants.
- Adam and Eve disobeyed God—the Fall—and as a result, all humans inherited Original Sin.
- Jesus Christ was the "second Adam," as St. Paul explained (Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15), and His death and Resurrection reversed the curse of Original Sin.

The book of Genesis is not a science textbook. It was not written to tell us the exact how and when of creation. It was written, rather, to tell us the who and the why of creation. The "who" is God, and the "why" is love. God created mankind in His image out of His overflowing love. When we read Genesis with an understanding of the literary techniques used, it does not challenge our faith, it enhances our faith.