



Genesis 1:1--2:4a; Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (June 4, 2023)

On Christmas Eve 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts Frank Borman, Bill Anders and Jim Lovell celebrated humanity's first orbit around the moon by reading ten verses of 3,000-year-old poetry. That poetry is familiar even to atheists: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Awe and spiritual insight¹ have created the **Judeo-Christian creation stories** along with many other praise statements that acknowledge the creative power of God and give God the glory.²

The creation story in Genesis doesn't enlighten us about history or science as we understand those disciplines today. How could it? That's not the purpose of this poetry. For cosmology we go with gratitude to the physicists, although it's worth noting that when it comes to the ultimate origins of Something rather than Nothing, and why there's conscious Life rather than mere inanimate Matter, cosmologists are just as baffled as theologians. Science attempts to explain the "*What*" and the "*How*." Religion explores the "*Why*."

By a stroke of divine revelation humanity has penned creation stories not simply for the purpose of setting the record straight but principally for the purpose of **worshipping God**, the Creator who has "powerfully" (that is, by the power of the Spirit) spoken the Word and called forth

¹ Romans 1:20

² Psalm 19; 33:1-9; 90:2; 104; 139:13-14; Exodus 20:11; Isaiah 40:26; 45:18; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Job 12:7-10; Jeremiah 10:12; John 1; Colossians 1:15-17;

creation in all its beauty, power, and diversity. Those stories tell us what kind of God the Lord is and what kind of relationship God intends to have with all creatures.

Reflecting on those stories, theologian Fr. Matthew Fox writes:

To speak of love [...] is to speak of goodness, original goodness, since God is understood as the origin of creation and the goodness of creation.

Thomas Aquinas, mystic and doctor of the church, had a lot to say about goodness. For him, “God is sheer goodness.” Such goodness may well account for the existence of all that is.

“Goodness of itself is generous. God is supremely good and therefore supremely generous.” that is. “Goodness of itself is generous. God is supremely good and therefore supremely generous.”³

The essential **goodness of creation** is the most conspicuous theme in this story. On the successive days of creation, the author repeats the same refrain six times, that what God created is good. Then, on the sixth day, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (1:31).

The goodness (or purposefulness, wholeness, perfection) of creation is declared upon the **harmony** (or inter-connectedness) for which it is (*continually*) being called forth. Creation is not a complete, finished product but always becoming: new living beings are being born all the time, new cells are being created as we live.

The goodness of creation is encountered in its **diversity** and **partnership**. The apparent dualistic language (night/day, male/female...) sets the boundaries (the framework) of all the in-between nuances.⁴

³ <https://dailymeditationswithmatthewfox.org/2023/03/30/creation-original-blessing-original-goodness-at-work/>

⁴ Merism is a rhetorical device used to express complexity and completeness.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-doctrine-of-creation/>

Perfection is a predicate of function: creation is good because it fits the purpose, and the purpose is the **wellbeing** of the whole. Each creature in partnership with others contributes to the sustenance and reproduction of the living system. And together, the living system set forth by the spoken Word of God returns to God in worshipful praise. Creation finds joy, purpose, unity, and meaning in adoring God. Singing the glory of God with one voice, one mind, and one heart, creation finds **mutual aid and belonging**. Divisions, hate, and violence are expressions of broken relationships that need healing through divine grace. In God we find wholeness and salvation: redemption is restoring the divine will for oneness and wholesomeness: Shalom.

Yet, before we get to what has been conceived as the original sin (human arrogance, indifference to God's will, self-glorification) there was an **original blessing**. Tapping into that dream and grace, we return back to our Creator's joy.⁵ Thomas Aquinas explains: "God converts all things, that is, God orders them toward the Godself as toward an end."⁶ "Love is a circle." And "each and every creature returns to its source so far as it bears a likeness to its source, according to its being and its nature, whereas it enjoys a certain perfection."⁷

As a divinely created entity that's distinct from God, Christians believe that **our earth is sacred**, but we don't believe that it's divine. It manifests God, who is immanent and intimate, but does not contain God. Nature is not God and creatures are not divine beings (pantheism). Yet, nature reflects (mirrors) the presence, the essence, and the power of God, who is near and present (pan-en-theism).

Perhaps, the most evident manifestations of the sacred in nature are the **beauty and inter-relatedness of all creatures**. *Because* nature is varied and inter-related, it is one and beautiful, reflecting the Beauty and One-

⁵ Psalm 16:11; Isaiah 12:3; 61:1-3; Matthew 25:21; John 15:11; 16:16-33; Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:8-9

⁶ Matthew Fox, *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*, pp. 99f. 108.

⁷ M. fox, *Sheer Joy*, pp. 62 and 64.

ness in diversity of God. Things exist for the sake of the whole, that is the good of the universe.

The Hebrew poet announces that when God finished his creative activity, "**God rested.**"

God's rest is a functional one in many ways. God models **rhythmic engagement** (a kind of creative on and off attitude) with the pacing of oneself and a wise use of time. God also models enjoyment, self-restoration, and celebration.

Creation is never done until it is "*finished*" (John 19:30). Christ (the perfect image and wisdom of God) on the cross completes (reconciles and manifests the purpose of) creation.

After the interdependence of creation was completed (but not finished), God takes a breathing brake (Gen 2:2). Satisfied with this "vast array" of created goodness, on the seventh day "God *rested* from all his work." God is at ease and confident. God can relax, rejoice, and enjoy. God appreciates and delights in creation. What God has made no one can unmake (Is 43:8-13, The Message).

He then turns to humankind and says, "here, now it is yours, to populate, steward, rule over, and manage, but not to plunder, neglect or exploit." Whereas creation was God's divine act, preservation is our distinctly human responsibility. It's up to us to care for the goodness of God's gift of creation. The notion of our planet's ongoing **preservation** is as important as its original creation.

The closeness of God to us in Christ and through the Holy Spirit allows us to see and to follow in Jesus' footsteps to give the Father glory. Empowered by the gifts of the ever-present Spirit, we are called to contribute to the wellbeing of all creation and to repair and heal that which is broken and wounded through abuse and violence. The Church continues in the world the work of Jesus until everything is brought to

the feet of the Father and “God will be all in all”.⁸ And God ultimately invites us into God’s rest⁹ where all nations will come and worship the Lord in a cosmic liturgy.

Less well-known than the astronauts's reading of Genesis from lunar space is a prayer that Frank Borman subsequently offered to "people everywhere." After completing their scientific work, he took a breath, and then prayed for God's good creation and every human being created in his image: “Give us, O God, the vision which can see thy love in the world, in spite of human failure. Give us the faith to trust the goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness. Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts, and show us what each one of us can do to set forth the coming of the day of universal peace. Amen.”

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:25-28

⁹ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/how-can-we-enter-god-s-rest.html>