

## **Lesson Unit**

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**TITLE:** A Catholic Approach to Genesis 1: Literary and Theological

**TOPIC:** Biblical interpretation in the Catholic tradition, St. Augustine's method for reading Genesis, findings of modern science as they relate to the creation narratives.

**DESCRIPTION:** Lesson 1 is intended to lead students to understand a Catholic view of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, hermeneutics, and exegesis. Lesson 1 will be the launch pad from which students will delve more deeply into the crucial question regarding the interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:4 discussed in Lesson 2. Lesson 3 will integrate the interpretive concepts discussed in the previous lessons in order to understand the harmony between the Genesis narrative and the science of biological evolution.

### **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

#### **Lesson 1:**

1. What is an authentic Catholic model of biblical interpretation that takes into consideration both divine and human authorship?

#### **Lesson 2:**

1. What fruits does a literary and theological approach yield for the interpreter?

#### **Lesson 3:**

1. How can we recognize the relational unity between the claims of modern science with a sound interpretive model of the creation narratives in Genesis?
2. What are the "signs of consonance" or areas of mutual enrichment between biological evolution and the theological truths of the creation narratives?

## **KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:**

### **Lesson 1:**

1. Students will be able to define key terms related to the inspiration and inerrancy of Sacred Scripture in the Catholic tradition.
2. Students will be able to explain the different senses of Scripture, with a special emphasis on the “*literal sense*.”
3. Students will be able to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of Scripture.

### **Lesson 2:**

1. Students will be able to describe different approaches to Genesis 1:1-2:4 and their implications.
2. Students will be able to describe and discuss a literary and theological approach to Gen 1:1-2:4.
3. Students will be able to understand St. Augustine’s approach and contribution to understanding Gen 1.
4. Students will be able to make theological statements based on Genesis 1:1-2:4.

### **Lesson 3:**

1. Students should be able to discern the differences in explanatory capacity between science and theology (e.g. “How” and “why”), and how those differences provide a distinct yet complementary picture of reality.
2. Students should be able to make a judgment on the importance of examining reality from a variety of perspectives and think critically about how this informs our understanding of the relationship between the creation narratives and the findings of modern science.
3. Students should be able to compare and contrast different interpretative models of the Bible to see the plausibility of each model, and how they each move beyond a mistaken literalistic interpretive model.
4. Students should be able to synthesize knowledge from distinct disciplines (science and theology) into an integrated model of interpretation that helps us see the

complementary and mutually enriching relationship between biblical/theological truths and the truths of biological evolution.

## **METHOD:**

### **Lesson 1**

#### I. Introduction:

*Classroom Activity:* Begin with a simple word association game asking students what comes to mind when they hear the word “inspiration.” Have at least one student write the one-word answers on the board so that all might see and avoid repetition. Build upon their responses helping them to distinguish between more common understandings of “inspiration” and the more technical theological term.

#### II. Key Terms

*Teacher Tip:* Teachers may feel that the “METHOD” section provides more material than can be covered in their designated class time. If that is the case, teachers should adjust the content to their class needs. For example, below we have provided two different but acceptable definitions for “INSPIRATION.” The teachers may choose to share both or use just one with their students. Depending on the needs of the students, you may also choose to skip over terms like “hermeneutics” or “exegesis.”

##### A. First Key Term: What is INSPIRATION in the theological sense?

###### 1. *New Catholic Encyclopedia Second Edition (7:492)*

INSPIRATION, BIBLICAL By inspiration of the Bible is meant a unique divine influence in virtue of which the people responsible for the OT and NT were so moved and enlightened by God that their work may truly be called the Word of God.

###### 2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church - Glossary*

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION: The gift of the Holy Spirit which assisted a human author to write a biblical book so that it has God as its author and teaches faithfully, without error, the saving truth that God has willed to be consigned to us.

###### 3. *Dei Verbum 11 -- Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation:*

*God chose certain men who... made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.*

4. Teachers take a few moments to discuss with the students what it means that *God is the author of Sacred Scripture*. Begin by asking them what makes someone an author? Is there a difference between a *writer* and an *author*? Is it possible for God to be one or both? Have responses written on the board so all can see and respond.

a. Catechism of the Catholic Church §105

*God is the author of Sacred Scripture.* “The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”

b. Some in non-Catholic Christian traditions maintain a verbal inspiration in which they believe God dictates his message to the biblical author. The biblical writer in this “dictation” theory functions more like a secretary writing down every word as it is dictated to them. In order to defend this thinking they may use Scripture passages like Exodus 24:4 which says, “Moses then wrote down all the words of the Lord.”

c. This is not the teaching of the Catholic Church. “No one today would hold that God dictated the words of Scripture in an audible manner to the ear of the sacred writer .... God could be the author of Sacred Scripture provided He inspired all the ideas, but the choice of words could be left to the human authors” (*INSPIRATION* - New Catholic Encyclopedia 2nd Edition 7:496).<sup>1</sup>

d. Catechism of the Catholic Church § 108

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<sup>1</sup> In a section entitled, *How Catholics Regard their Bible*, Catholic biblical scholar, Daniel J. Harrington, writes this, “Catholicism is not a religion of ‘the book.’ Islam may well be. And some say that Judaism and Protestantism (with its insistence on *sola scriptura*) are, too. But Catholics view the Bible primarily a witness to a person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Word made flesh. Thus, Catholicism is more a religion of a person” (Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, & Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 85)

Still, the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book.” Christianity is the religion of the “Word” of God, “not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living.” If the Scriptures are to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, “open (our) minds to understand the Scriptures.”

➤ Below are two main NT Scriptures on *divine inspiration*.

e. Scriptural support - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

1) “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

2) The phrase *inspired by God* comes from the unique Greek word *theópneustos* (*theos* “God” and *pneō* “to breathe”) which has been literally translated as “God-breathed” as in God breathed out the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

f. Scriptural support - 2 Peter 1:20-21

1) “*Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God.*”

2). The word *moved* by the Spirit in 2 Peter 1:20-21 is the same word used of a ship being carried along by the winds (Acts 27:15-17). This imagery helps us see how the Holy Spirit moved the human authors, like wind in the sails of a boat.

g. Christopher Baglow, PhD. *Wonder Conference: Science and the Bible*

1) “When God inspired the Bible’s sacred authors, specifically in what way or ways did he inspire them? What is the most

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<sup>2</sup> For a helpful discussion the use of *theópneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16 see Benjamin Fiore, S.J. *The Pastoral Epistles* in the *Sacra Pagina* series (Michael Glazier – Liturgical Press 2007).

essential, the most indispensable element of inspiration, without which we could not call a text “the word of God”? In this regard we will rely on St. Thomas Aquinas, whose theology of inspiration is that, although God sometimes illuminated the imaginations of the biblical authors, giving them visions and dreams, he just as often worked within what we might call their natural human knowledge. BUT either way, he ALWAYS illuminated their judgment of what was before them, causing those judgments to be informed and guided by what Aquinas called “the divine light of understanding.” Whether a biblical author was thinking about events in the life of God’s chosen people, or visions they received, or (in the case of Genesis 1) the meaning and origin of the natural world they perceived around them, God gave them HIS perspective, the God’s-eye view, so to speak. But they remained true human authors, within the limits of their own times and culture.”

2) “What happens in biblical inspiration? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, biblical inspiration is a form of prophecy in which the Holy Spirit illuminates an author’s judgment of what they see, and whatever they see. It is not an abiding gift of the Holy Spirit, but one that is operative whenever, and in whatever way necessary, for God to communicate to the biblical author something God wishes them to communicate to human beings.”

h. God as the Author of Sacred Scripture

- a. *Dei Verbum* 9 Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: SACRED SCRIPTURE ... *is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.*
- b. Catechism of the Catholic Church § 136: *God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth.*
- c. *Christological analogy*: God’s Word in human words, like Christ is fully human and fully divine.
- d. “The words of God, expressed inhuman language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when

He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men” (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, §11).<sup>3</sup>

B. Second Key Term: INERRANCY

1. *The understanding of Scripture as conveying without error the truth that God wished to be recorded for the sake of our salvation.* (Daniel J. Harrington, SJ)

2. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* 11: “... since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.”

3. “... the Angelic Doctor (St. Thomas Aquinas) already observed in these words: ‘In Scripture divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use amongst men.’ For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, ‘except sin,’ so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error. In this

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<sup>3</sup> Now, if the word of God in Scripture is truly human discourse, then like Christ’s human flesh it is going to have its defects. Just as Christ the Word of God crucified was a “stumbling block” [*skandalon*] to Jews and “folly” [*mōría*] to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:22-25), so God’s word in Scripture also has a “scandalous” or “moronic” element to it. And yet, as in the case of the God-man himself, the foolishness [*morós*] of God’s word in true human words is wiser than men, and its weakness is stronger than men. How so? Ultimately, it has to do with something that I will be arguing for later in this book: that reality itself has a cruciform or paschal structure—that we are paradoxically fulfilled only when we humble ourselves, like the persons of the Trinity, through a gift of self-emptying kenosis (Phil 2:5–11) ... the Bible’s weakness is no cause for shame—on the contrary, its humility, vulnerability, and “scandalous” nature is inextricably bound up with its redemptive character” (Matthew J. Ramage. *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2022, Pp. 98-99). D. Farfasfalvy states, “... in the way Paul speaks in Philippians 2:8-10 of the Incarnation of the Son of God and John speaks in John 1:14 of the Logos becoming flesh, we can speak of the word of God becoming Scripture. In the scriptural word the Son manifests his intention to “empty himself” and “take upon himself the form of a servant,” becoming human in a physically bounded world, in which the perception and transmission of truth is conditioned by space, time, point of view, discourse, context, historical circumstance, and, ultimately, the human being’s exposure to constant change” (Denis Farkasfalvy, O. Cist. *Inspiration and Interpretation: A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2010, p. 231 )

consists that ‘condescension’ of the God of providence, which St. John Chrysostom extolled with the highest praise and repeatedly declared to be found in the Sacred Books” (Pope Pius XII *Divino Afflante Spiritu* § 37)

#### *INERRANCY Discussion Questions*

a. Lead the students in a discussion asking/answering the questions: *does inerrancy apply to matters of salvation alone, or does inerrancy apply to issues of history or geography or science?*

b. Here would be a significant difference between an authentically Catholic interpretation and a more fundamentalist one. Six-day creationists and many fundamentalists would insist that the Bible is completely error free, even in matters of science.

c. Does inerrancy apply to all parts or issues of the Bible? Why or why not? This would be especially important on issues related to gender roles.

#### C. Third Key Term: HERMENEUTICS

1. What is hermeneutics? Hermeneutics is the field of study that deals with the interpretation of written texts and oral communication.

2. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation; the principles that govern sound biblical interpretation.

#### D. Fourth Key Term: EXEGESIS

1. *To lead out the meaning*; scholarly investigation of the meaning of a biblical text.

2. “The science of biblical interpretation is usually known technically as exegesis (Gk *exēgēsis*, explanation) Exegesis is the investigation of the biblical text. (John L. McKenzie, S. J. *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 393).

#### E. Fifth Key Term: INTERPRETATION (OF THE BIBLE)



In the Catholic context INTERPRETATION is *The effort to ascertain the meaning of the Bible intended by its divine and human authors* (Catholic Bible Dictionary, p. 391).

III. Catholic Interpretation -- Catechism of the Catholic Church §§ 115-118.

A. “According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: The *literal* and the *spiritual*, the latter being subdivided into the *allegorical*, *moral*, and *anagogical*.”

B. “The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

C. The *literal* sense answers the questions, “What did the author mean?” and “How did the first readers understand him”?

1. You may remember Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride* –  
“You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”  
What do Catholic interpreters mean by “Literal”?

2. § 116 Catechism of the Catholic 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." (Underline added)

- a. Discovered by *exegesis* – not simply reading the passage but completing the necessary steps (discussed in Lesson 2) to discover the author’s original intent and the original readers’ understanding of that text
- b. Following the rules of sound interpretation (hermeneutics).
- c. By “literal” the Catholic Church (St. Augustine) does not mean a crass literalism or an overly literalistic approach that may lead to simplistic readings of the biblical text and does not take seriously the literary genre of the text and other considerations such as figures of speech, parable, allegory, simile, or metaphor.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The *spiritual senses* answers the question, “What does the text mean to me?” There are three types of *spiritual senses*: 1) The allegorical sense answers the question, “In what way does this text point to Christ?” 2) The moral sense answers the question, “how should I now live?” 3) The anagogical sense answers the question, “What does this text say about our destiny?”

<sup>5</sup> “If the Catholic Church teaches that all of Scripture is inerrant, then even the most apparently unscientific and outdated passages of Scripture must in some way also be inerrant. In other words, if we find that the Book of Genesis states things that are difficult to reconcile with what we know today through philosophy, historical criticism, or evolutionary science, it nevertheless

- d. In Catholic exegesis, the interpreter seeks to determine the purpose and intention of the original author as well as how the original readers have understood the writing.
- e. Catechism of the Catholic Church § 110

In order to discover *the sacred authors' intention*, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. "For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression."

- 1) Conditions of time
- 2) Culture
- 3) Literary genres in use at that time
- 4) Modes of feeling
- 5) Speaking and narrating

3. Christian Smith in *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* describes what he calls "biblicism": "... a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability" (Grand Rapids: Baker-Brazos, 2011, 2012, p. viii).

- a. The real problem is the particular biblicist theory about the Bible; it not only makes young believers vulnerable to being disabused of their naive acceptance of that theory but it also often has the additional consequence of putting their faith commitments at risk. Biblicism often paints smart, committed youth into a corner that is for real reasons impossible to occupy for many of those who actually confront its problems. When some

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must convey something true. Yet, if everything asserted by Scripture's inspired authors is to be considered with-out error, then the difficulty arises: how do we know what precisely is being asserted as true in the biblical text? This is where the literal sense of Scripture comes in. To be interested in the literal sense of Scripture is not the same as ascribing to *literalism*, wherein one assumes that the Bible contains the sort of raw history that would be captured on a video camera (which itself can indeed be quite biased). Contrary to such a *literalistic* approach, the truly literal—or perhaps better, *literary* or *literate*—sense of Scripture considers not just the bare meaning of the Scripture's words, but what through them its human authors meant to convey to the people of their time through by means of their literary craft" (Matthew J. Ramage. *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2022, Pp. 99-100).

of those youth give up on biblicism and simply walk across the wet paint, it is flawed biblicism that is partly responsible for those losses of faith.

b. “St. Thomas Aquinas’ twin principles for interpreting the creation narratives in Genesis: First, hold the *truth* of Scripture without wavering. Second, be ready to abandon a particular explanation of Scripture if it is proven to be false, lest Scripture be exposed to the ridicule of unbelievers and obstacles posed to their believing” (Matthew J. Ramage, Pp. 24-25)

C. St. Augustine - *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book 1 Chap.19 Par. 39.

“And it frequently happens that even non-Christians will have knowledge of this sort in a way that they can substantiate with scientific arguments or experiments. Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on one’s guard against at all costs, that they should every hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics, and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter when they see them to be *toto caelo*, as the saying goes, wide of the mark. And what is so vexing is not that misguided people should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such views and, to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper basket as so many ignoramuses. Whenever, you see, they catch out some members of the Christian community making mistakes on a subject which they know inside out, and defending their hollow opinions on the authority of our books, on what grounds are they going to trust those books on the resurrection of the dead and the hope of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, when they suppose they include any number of mistakes and fallacies on matters which they themselves have been able to master either by experiment or by the surest of calculations? It is impossible to say what trouble and grief such rash, self-assured know-alls cause more cautious and experienced brothers and sisters. Whenever they find themselves challenged and taken to task for some shaky and false theory of theirs by people who do not recognize the authority of our books, they try to defend what they have aired with the most frivolous temerity and patent falsehood by bringing forward these same sacred books to justify it. Or they even quote from memory many things said in them which they imagine will provide them valid evidence, *not understanding either what they are saying, or the matters on which they are asserting themselves* (1 Tim 1:7).”

## Lesson 2

### I. Introduction

A. We are now ready to delve into the biblical text of Genesis 1:1-2:3. Before even having them read the text for themselves, begin by asking them what they know and understand about the Genesis Creation account. Be prepared for students to reference other creation accounts, especially Genesis 2:4-25. Summarize their responses in one-to-two words and write them on the board so all may see. You may be able to categorize their responses under several headings including the idea of myth. It may be helpful to discuss the difference between myth in the popular sense of the word and the more technical meaning as a genre,

B. “When we hear the word ‘myth’ today, it is often in the context of a headline like ‘Top 10 Myths about Sugar!’ In its current usage, ‘myth’ tends to be deployed as a synonym for ‘fallacy’ or ‘lie.’ Yet we have already seen in this book that the popular notion of certain words (e.g., ‘theory,’ ‘literal’) is often drastically different from a correct technical understanding of them as used in the academy” (M. Ramage, p. 123).<sup>6</sup>

“MYTH. Popularly, a story that is untrue, imaginative, or fictitious. In biblical studies the word has been applied in a positive and functional way (though misunderstood because of association with its popular meaning) to literary forms that express transcendent realities and truths in this-worldly terms. *Ex*: Some scholars say hell is not to be understood as a literal place (by this definition of myth), but as the human condition of being separated from God.” (F. B. Huey, Jr. and Bruce Corley, p. 130)

### II. Quickly review Lesson 1 and the hermeneutical/interpretive issues discussed.

View the video *Seeds of Life: Creation, Evolution, and St. Augustine* and allow students the opportunity to respond through comments, observations, and questions.

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<sup>6</sup> “Looking at how G.K. Chesterton describes myth in relation to non-Christian traditions can help disabuse us of confusion in this regard. After lamenting that ‘he who has no sympathy with myths has no sympathy with men,’ the literary giant adds: ‘The substance of all such paganism may be summarized thus. It is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination alone.’ For Chesterton, myth was not equivalent to falsehood—he understood it to be more like a dream that captures glimpses of reality” (Matthew J. Ramage. *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2022, p. 123).

Video excerpt St. Augustine - *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*:

“... the 4th-5th century bishop and theologian St. Augustine of Hippo, who worked on interpreting Genesis for most of his adult life ... produced his masterpiece—*On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*. By ‘literal meaning,’ he simply meant ‘according to the intention of the author,’ both the human author and the Divine Author.”

“Augustine’s guiding principle of interpretation was reverence for God’s perfect wisdom. The First Creation Account narrates God’s creative activity over six 24-hour days. But Augustine found the idea of separate creative acts on God’s part to be problematic. If God is perfect, his creative act must also be perfect, lacking nothing, requiring no additional divine acts to complete it, with nature itself ready to do what God intends from its very beginnings. And from this vantage point he noticed something strange and wonderful about the details of the Genesis narrative, something that today almost seems like a prophecy of future science.

What the great theologian noticed was a discrepancy in the ways God speaks in the account. Sometimes God says “let there be,” as he does when he creates light. But in other places, when living things are created, God says “let the sea produce,” as he does with fish and birds, or “let the earth bring forth,” as he does with vegetation and with land animals. Earth and sea are “allowed” by God to produce these creatures. Augustine concludes that this second kind of command refers to living things as present in the world not as actual beings, but as potentials hidden within the natural elements—Augustine calls these potentials “rational seeds,” what we might call “the seeds of life.” Because God is perfectly wise, he made a universe naturally capable of producing living things from nonliving matter when the circumstances were right. “All these [living] things around us,” he wrote, “have been seminally and primordially created in the very fabric, as it were, or texture of the elements; but they require the right occasion to actually emerge into being.” (*Seeds of Life: Creation, Evolution, and St. Augustine*)

In short, the cosmos itself was a real cause of living things. And he doesn’t stop with the plants and animals. In Genesis 1, God does not say “let the earth bring forth humans.” But in the Second Creation Account which occupies the 2nd chapter of Genesis, we read that God formed man from the clay (literally: slime, or mud) of the earth. Therefore, Augustine concludes that human beings, in regard to our animal bodies, are no exception; the universe brings them forth naturally as

well, and so we must be humble because of our earthy origins: “So if [God] himself formed both the man from the earth and the beasts from the earth, what pre-eminence does humanity enjoy in this respect . . . ?” The same world which was life-giving in its very texture is, Augustine asserted, the origin of the human body too—naturally. Somehow the physical and the spiritual are united in harmony, then and now, in producing the human being, filling Augustine with amazement at the joining of body and soul.

### III. Exercise.

#### A. Analysis: A Literary Approach

1. Reading Genesis 1:1-2:4 (15 minutes). Create and distribute copies of Genesis 1:1-2:4 and assignment guides. Have one of the students provide a dramatic reading of the account for the class and then ask students to read the text silently to themselves.
2. Encourage them to conduct a close reading of the text, paying special attention to the language. Prof. Rolf Knierim of Claremont School of Theology would often tell his students to “listen to the text.”
3. By a “literary approach” the reader/interpreter focuses on the biblical text itself, first and foremost, as a body of literature. As such the reader/interpreter seeks to understand the biblical text by determining the literary genre, structure, and literary devices utilized by the author to communicate their message. (Leland Ryken *How to Read the Bible as Literature* and Robert Alter *A Literary Approach to the Bible*).  
(<https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-alter-2/a-literary-approach-to-the-bible/>)
4. Have the students conduct a literary analysis of Genesis 1:1-2:4.

*Teacher Tip:* Teachers may want to develop and use a graphic organizer for the questions to be used in the literary analysis.

- *How* was it written?
- Identify the passage in its literary context. Immediate context, book and canon.
- Identify the literary genre: what kind of literature is this?
- What is the structure (outline) of Genesis 1:1-2:4? How is the text organized?
- Who are/is the central character(s) and how are they characterized?
- Are there any editorial comments?
- Are any things being juxtaposed? Compared and contrasted?
- What words, phrases, or “formulas” are repeated? (Example: “And God said . . .”)
- What figures of speech are used?

- What type of imagery is used?
- What is the point of view of the writer/narrator? Often the biblical writers with an “omniscient perspective, a God’s eye-view.
- What is the tone of the passage?
- Identify and define key words.
- What is the plot of Genesis 1:1-2:4?
- Biblical writers often write in response to a question. What question is the author answering?
- Compare with other creation accounts, especially Genesis 2:4-25.

5. Discuss and lead students to answer the text's historical-critical questions.

- Who wrote Genesis 1:1-2:4 and who were the original readers?
- Traditional, but a minority opinion is Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch.
- If Moses wrote Genesis 1:1-2:4, then the readers would have been Israelites living during the Exodus.
  - The majority opinion is that the Pentateuch as a whole was the work of several sources including the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomist (D) and the Priestly (P) writer; and that Genesis 1 is the work of the “Priestly” writer or just “P” for short.
  - Hebrew Bible scholar and Yale professor John J. Collins comments, “The Priestly document is the easiest source to recognize. The dry, formulaic style is familiar from the account of Genesis 1. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. It is marked by a strong interest in genealogies, in dates, in ritual observance (the Creator observes the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day)” (John J. Collins, p. 30).
  - Pope Benedict XVI explains the historical context for the first creation account in Genesis 1. He writes, “The moment when creation became a dominant theme occurred during the Babylonian Exile. It was then that the account that we have just heard – based, to be sure, on very ancient traditions – assumed its present form” (Pope Benedict XVI - Cardinal Ratzinger, p. 10-11).
  - The *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation account provides the background for the Genesis account. See Ratzinger, Pp. 12-14 and Baglow, p. 80 for two helpful discussions on the place the Enuma Elish plays in proper understanding of Genesis 1.

- While Genesis 1-11 uses the language of myth, Genesis 1:1-2:3 is *antimyth*.

The use of the Hebrew *'Elohîm* occurs 2,750 times in the OT. In this context it refers to God as the transcendent creator. Contra the gods of the ancient Near East, *'Elohîm* is not *in* the creation rather *'Elohîm* is the one who creates and sustains the creation. The peoples of the ancient world worshiped the gods of the wind, the sun. The city of *Beth-Shemesh* is literally the “house of the sun,” named after the “sun god.” Some believe that the ancient city of Jericho may be named after the moon god. While some argue that Genesis 1 is an ancient myth, and it certainly utilizes the language of myth, Genesis 1 is more accurately an *antimyth* polemic. That is, the narrator of Genesis 1 argues for the uniqueness of *'Elohîm* over and against the myths of the deities of the ancient world. Unlike the gods of the ancient world that were seen *in* the creation *'Elohîm* is above and beyond the creation. *'Elohîm* is not in the sun, the moon, or the stars, rather *'Elohîm* is the one, true God who speaks them into existence.

- “Specifically, one can appreciate Genesis 1–11 as myth—and, as we will see, anti-myth—by comparing and contrasting it with other stories that were circulating in the ancient Near East. Knowing this context is not merely a scholarly curiosity. It bears directly upon the meaning and purpose of Genesis’s creation narratives, for knowing something about when and where a text was written is invaluable for understanding why” (Matthew J. Ramage, p.25).

4. Collaboration and Discussion (15 minutes). Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 students and ask them to discuss the following questions:
  - a. *Why* was it written?
  - b. What are some of the key themes that emerge in the text?
  - c. What do you think the purpose of Genesis 1:1-2:4 might be?
  - d. Can the message of Genesis 1 be summed up in a single sentence?

After 10-15 minutes of group discussion, ask each group to share their observations and insights, and prepare to make theological statements based upon the literary analysis.

## B. Analysis: A Theological Approach

1. Our work does not end with a literary analysis. After the literary analysis is completed, the readers/interpreters must now concern themselves with the theological task of determining what the biblical passage says about God, humankind, creation, and liturgy.



2. Old Testament scholar Ronald M. Hal in his excellent work on the theology of the book of Ruth said, “Surely the most natural way to analyze a writer’s theology is to examine what his writing says about God” (Ronald M. Hals, p. 3).
3. Continuing in group collaboration, have at least one (or two) group answer the question: what does the text say about God? Have one group answer the question: what does the text say about humankind? Have One group answer the question: what does the text say about creation? And finally, have one group answer the question: what does the text say about worship and liturgy? Have the students share their findings.

*Teacher Tip:* teachers may consider using a “jigsaw” strategy in the following classroom exercise under #4 regarding theological themes.

“The Jigsaw strategy asks a group of students to become ‘experts’ on a specific text or body of knowledge and then share that material with another group of students. This strategy offers a way to help students understand and retain information while they develop their collaboration skills. Because students know they will be responsible for teaching the new content to their peers, they often feel more accountable for learning the material. The Jigsaw strategy is most effective when students know that they will be using the information they have learned from each other to create a final product, participate in a class discussion, or acquire material that will be on a test.”

[www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/jigsaw-developing-community-and-disseminating-knowledge](http://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/jigsaw-developing-community-and-disseminating-knowledge)

4. Here is a list of some the theological themes that emerge from the Creation Account:

- God is the transcendent Creator.
- Creation is made without *Effort*: God speaks it into existence.
- Creation is made without *Evil*: it is very Good.
- God brings Order out of Chaos.
- God brings Light out of Darkness.
- God prepares a home and place of habitation for his people and creation.
- Ten creative acts correspond to the Ten Commandments.
- Humankind is the climax of creation (but not the account as a whole).

- Humankind is uniquely made in the image and likeness of the Creator.
- As a result of being made in the image and likeness of God, humankind has dominion over the creation.
- The Sabbath rest is the climax of the creation account.
  - a. Regarding the “goodness” of God and the “goodness” of the creation the Ecumenical Council of Florence affirmed:

*Most firmly it believes, professes and preaches that the one true God, Father, Son and holy Spirit, is the creator of all things that are, visible and invisible, who, when he willed it, made from his own goodness all creatures, both spiritual and corporeal, good indeed because they are made by the supreme good, but mutable because they are made from nothing, and it asserts that there is no nature of evil because every nature, in so far as it is a nature, is good.*

- b. Regarding the phrase “God said ...” – Pope Benedict XVI – J. Ratzinger

“‘God said’ appears ten times in the creation account. In this way the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments. This makes us realize that these Ten Commandments are, as it were, an echo of creation; they are not arbitrary inventions for the purpose of erecting barriers to human freedom but signs pointing to the spirit, the language, and the meaning of creation; they are a translation of the language of the universe, a translation of God’s logic, which constructed the universe” (Pope Benedict - Cardinal Ratzinger, p. 26).

- c. Genesis and the *Enuma Elish* (See M. Ramage p, 127-128).

#### Genesis and *Enuma Elish*

- Chaos precedes creation in both texts. Before God performs his first creative act in Genesis, we read that in the beginning “the earth was without form and void” (Gn 1:2). For its part, *Enuma Elish* begins with a theogony, a genealogy of the various gods’ origin from preexisting matter. While the Genesis passage does not clearly teach that the universe had a beginning in time, *it differs from other myths in affirming that God precedes creation and exists independently of matter, thus implicitly affirming the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo—the universe’s total dependence on God—through the literary lens of establishing order from chaos.*

- In *Enuma Elish*, chaos is represented by the saltwater monstrous mother goddess Tiamat. *The term Tehom—possibly a cognate to Tiamat—is used in Genesis, yet it is demythologized and simply means “the deep” (Gen 1:2).*
- Light preexists the sun, moon, and stars in both (Gn 1:3; 1:14-19).
- In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk becomes Babylon’s high god by slaying Tiamat, dividing her carcass into two and forging heaven and earth with them. *Genesis demythologizes this story too, as God makes a “firmament” that divides the waters—not demoted to the status of inanimate creation—into two (Gn 1:6-8).*
- The sequence of the days is similar in each, culminating in rest (Gn 2:3). However, whereas in Genesis the world is fashioned as a home for humans to flourish, in *Enuma Elish* Marduk is much more interested in making dwelling places for the gods than for humans, who are not in view at all until much later.
- *Enuma Elish* and the Bible’s first creation account climax in the building of a sanctuary (i.e., Eden).
- In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk slays Tiamat’s chief warrior Kingu and forms the first humans out of his corpse. These humans are made to do the toil of the lower gods. By contrast, in Genesis 1:26, God makes man master of creation.

### Lesson 3 (50 mins)

#### **I. Introductory Activity**

The purpose of this activity is to help students see the complexity of reality, and how we need multiple perspectives to see the “bigger picture.” Two distinct yet complementary perspectives through which we can understand reality as a whole are science and theology. Once we understand each perspective and what aspect of reality that they reveal, we can see how they are not in competition but actually mutually enrich each other. We can get students to see this issue through the explanatory categories of “how” and “why”; the questions that science and theology answer, respectively. Below are three examples the teacher can choose from. Each one in its own way accomplishes the goal stated above. While these activities are meant to activate student knowledge about how the two disciplines (science and theology) relate, they also convey an essential point that is carried on throughout the lesson: the complexity of reality demands that we look at and explain it using a variety of distinct yet mutually supportive perspectives.

A. Looking at the human person from a variety of perspectives

Perspective of chemistry: The human person is an organic (carbon-based) compound, a collection of atoms including about 60% oxygen, 18.5% carbon, 9.5% hydrogen, and so on

Perspective of biology: The human person is a mammal and a member of the hominin species *Homo sapiens*.

Perspective of socioeconomics (A classification involving education, job and economic class): This person is a member of the middle-class, has a family size of four

Catholic faith perspective: This person created in the image and likeness of God is a baptized and confirmed member of the Body of Christ

Ask students: *Which of these statements is more right to say about this human person?* Help students see that these are mutually enriching perspectives; they are not competitive answers to the same question. Rather, they are different answers from different perspectives, all of which converge onto the same reality of the human person.

B. Mary Midgely's example of the metaphor of the world as a "huge Aquarium":

"We cannot see it as a whole from above, so we peer in at it through a number of small windows ... We can eventually make quite a lot of sense of this habitat if we patiently put together the data from different angles. But if we insist that our own window is the only one worth looking through, we shall not get very far.

Invite students to think about looking at an Aquarium. Is it possible to see all that is in it from just one angle? What about an aerial view of it? Would that be enough? Students may describe the process of walking around the Aquarium, looking at it from multiple angles, peering within hidden corners to see the fish in the shadows, etc. Ask students: "How does this experience translate to how we should understand the whole of reality?"

C. Categorizing claims based on their explanatory capacity:

Students will be given a chart with three columns:

1. Column 1: the action under consideration (e.g. Teapot whistling)
2. Column 2: “How”
3. Column 3: “Why”

Students are asked to categorize the “Scientific” and “Teleological” statements listed below in either the (“How”) and (“Why”) column based on the type of explanation they think the statement is offering.

1. The teapot whistling

\*Scientific description: a liquid is heated to a temperature such that its vapor pressure is above that of the surroundings.

\*Teleological description (or description of meaning/purpose): John is making tea for his friend Arthur.

2. Aubrey joyfully sitting by Greg

\*Scientific description of romantic attraction: High levels of dopamine and a related hormone, norepinephrine, are released making a person giddy, energetic, and euphoric.

\*Teleological description (or description of meaning/purpose): Because Aubrey is celebrating her and Greg’s one-year anniversary

II. Video/Lecture:

**OPTIONAL**

- a. If there is time, the teacher can show the “Seeds of Life” video again to students during class. OR, a teacher may assign that students re-watch the video at home before the lesson.

This video ties together what has been covered already by using St. Augustine as a model for reconciliation. In this video, the narrator describes how the idea of evolution was present in St. Augustine’s interpretive model for the creation narratives in Genesis. Augustine recognizes the importance of the “literal meaning” of the text and sees within the text of Genesis an evolutionary understanding of creation, especially the physical world (including human bodies). Augustine leaves the question of “how” this all happened unresolved, for he knows that Scripture was not written to give an answer to that question.

St. Augustine, acknowledging the “dual perspectives” (the “Why” and the “How” categories) explanatory model of reality, knows that the truths communicated in Genesis give a deeper analysis of reality than what science gives us. In his view, the truth of God’s perfect wisdom and power allows us to accept the possibility of God working through natural causes to bring about living things through an evolutionary process.

A. \*Write-Pair-Share Activity to discuss the video.

a. Give students several minutes to respond to one or all three of these questions. After several minutes, students pair up and share or read each other’s responses; then, partners share their responses with other groups or the whole class.

1. How does St. Augustine use the “dual perspectives” model for understanding evolution?
2. Based on what we have said before about biblical interpretation, what mistaken assumption does Christopher Hitchens make?

**LECTURE NOTES** (The next step in the lesson after the reflection questions listed above are discussed)

B. Science Answering the “How”:

a. See the “Science Addendum” in the “Resources” section.

Students will likely have varying knowledge of evolutionary theory; they will likely be less familiar with Charles Lyell. Therefore, it may be helpful to have students spend time reviewing this material, such as having them read the addendum in pairs and share with each other what they found interesting.

**Addendum:** The addendum provides a brief scientific overview of the evolution of the human body and the research of Charles Lyell. The purpose of the addendum is to provide some scientific background to the question left open-ended by St. Augustine: the “how” process of biological evolution as a response to the notion of “special creation”.

**Time Permitted:** For more scientific support of the theory of evolution, the teacher could show the video “Biological Evolution and the Kinship of All Life” (Found in the ‘Resources’ section).

C. Signs of Consonance and Opportunities for Enrichment

a. If we understand the true meaning of Scripture in general, and the creation narratives, we can better see how the findings of evolutionary science enrich, rather than contradict, that understanding.

i. Divine Openness and Evolution

a. Reading the creation account in light of evolutionary science, gives us a deeper perspective on how God creates that moves beyond “special creation” (the idea that God created everything as it is in a single divine act).

b. “*Spirit of God*”—reference to not just God’s power, but also to the Third Person of the Trinity, who is seen here as “the agent of God’s activity in creation.”

c. Creation is empowered by the Spirit to have an openness to spontaneous unfolding of evolutionary change, an openness to novelty and spontaneity

“Freedom” is being used analogously here. We are not ascribing free will to the biological world. Rather, freedom is referring to the effects of secondary causes—the built-in causal powers of created things that produce real effects within creation

d. The Spirit’s empowerment of natural causes to be real causes in creation can help allay our anxiety when considering exceedingly improbable and unexplained natural events, such as *abiogenesis* (the origin of the first living things).

ii. The wisdom of nature and the wisdom of God

a. Christ as *Logos*, the divine wisdom involved in creation

b. We see this divine wisdom manifested in the order and intelligibility of the universe

c. In biological evolution, the divine wisdom is perhaps best manifested in the structure and function of RNA, DNA, and the genetic code present in all living things

d. The scientist Francis Collins, former director of the Human Genome Project, describes the genetic code as “the language of God”

“Everything I do as a scientist reinforces my sense of God's presence because every new discovery is, if you believe in his role as creator, a glimpse into his mind....sequencing the human genome...was an incredibly breathtaking experience...To have that laid out in front of you for the first time is breathtaking to any scientist, but particularly if you see it as that significant language of God”—Francis Collins

iii. Biological evolution as the great “amen”

a. The literary pattern of the First Creation Account can be looked at as a “call-and-response”

God speaks, creation acts:

a. God commands the earth to act: “Let the earth put forth vegetation (Gen. 1:11)

b. God commands the water to act: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures” (Gn. 1:20-23)

c. On the sixth day, God commands the earth to act again: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds” (Gn. 1:24-31)



D. God is working through creation by capacitating creation to be real causes of change and creativity within it, such as bringing about new kinds of living things. The process of biological evolution helps us see this cooperative relationship between God and creatures in a new light.

E. All of creation, then, participates in God's power and purpose in a great "Amen" in which both God and creation proclaim: God as the "originating, empowering 'Amen' of God and the responding, empowered, participating 'amen' of the universe, its elements, and each level of creaturely existence" (Christ Baglow, *Faith, Science, & Reason*)

D. Final Words from St. Augustine:

"Often a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other parts of the world, about the motions and orbits of the stars and even their sizes and distances,... and this knowledge he holds with certainty from reason and experience. It is thus offensive and disgraceful for an unbeliever to hear a Christian talk nonsense about such things, claiming that what he is saying is based in Scripture. We should do all that we can to avoid such an embarrassing situation, lest the unbeliever see only ignorance in the Christian and laugh to scorn."-- -St. Augustine, "De Genesi ad Litteram" ("The Literal Meaning of Genesis"—an unfinished work)

**Have students reflect on the following question:**

*After reading this quote from St. Augustine, why is it necessary for evangelization to get the science-theology question right?*

After giving them time to respond to this question, have students discuss their responses, either in pairs or as a whole class.

**ASSESSMENT:**

## RESOURCES:

### Lesson 1

*New American Bible Revised Edition*. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc. Washington, D. C. 2010.

*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum* Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965

*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* by Mons. Richard Malone, Edt.  
<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/interpretation-of-the-bible-in-the-church-9783>

*Science and the Bible: Wonder Conference Science and the Bible*. Christopher T. Baglow, PhD

Christopher T. Baglow. *Faith, Science, & Reason: Theology on the Cutting Edge*. Midwest Theological Forum: Downers Grove, IL. 2019. Pp. 72-76.

*Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* - Libreria Editrice Vatican (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000).

Matthew J. Ramage. *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2022.

### Lesson 2

*New American Bible Revised Edition*. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc. Washington, D. C. 2010.

*Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II* - Libreria Editrice Vatican (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000).

John J. Collins. *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007.

F. B. Huey, Jr. and Bruce Corley. *A Student's Dictionary for Biblical and Theological Studies: A Handbook of Technical Terms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1983.

Leland Ryken *How to Read the Bible as Literature*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

Robert Alter. *A Literary Approach to the Bible* by Robert Alter in “*Commentary*” 1975.  
(<https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-alter-2/a-literary-approach-to-the-bible/>)

Matthew J. Ramage. *From the Dust of the Earth: Benedict XVI, the Bible, and the Theory of Evolution*. Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2022.

*THE WORKS OF ST. AUGUSTINE. A Translation for the 21st Century: On Genesis*.  
John. E Rotelle, O. S. A., Editor. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1999.

Pope Benedict XVI – Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning ... ' A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*.

Ronald M. Hals *The Theology of the Book of Ruth*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969.

Gary Anderson. *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament: A Theology in the Service of Biblical Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

We also recommend the following “commentaries” on the book of *Genesis*: Gordon Wenham, Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westermann, Terence Fretheim, Walter Brueggemann, Nahum Sarna, Allan Ross, David Cotter, Ephraim A. Speiser, Hermann Gunkel, and George Coates.

### Lesson 3

Christopher T. Baglow. *Faith, Science, & Reason: Theology on the Cutting Edge*. Midwest Theological Forum: Downers Grove, IL. 2019. Pgs. 201-205

### [Presentation Slides](#)

[“Seeds of Life” video](#) (13 minutes, 22 seconds)

[“Biological Evolution and the Kinship of All Life” video](#) (8 minutes, 24 seconds)

### [Science Addendum](#)

